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## DEADWOOD DICK, JR.'S, BOMBSHELL.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER.



DEADWOOD DICK WAS NOT MISTAKEN. DANGER, IF NOT DEATH, AWAITED THEM.

## Deadwood Dick, Jr.'s, Bombshell;

OR,

Captain Blue-beard's Girl Cat's-paw.

The Sensation of Silver City.

BY ED. L. WHEELER,

AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS, ETC.

## CHAPTER I.

## BILLETS FOR BULLETS.

"SAY, Pete Parrot."

"What aire et, Dicky, boy?"

"I begin to suspect that things are not just right here."

"Didn't I tell ye so? Didn't I say I thought that gal's story was rather strong?"

"It isn't that; I think the girl told us the truth. I'm afraid there is danger for us in that clump of cottonwoods, though, where she appointed to meet us."

"Wull, as ter that, Dicky, there may be danger for somebody else, too, if they try on any tricks with us. We have brought our guns along, and we know how to shoot a little bit, I reckon."

The first speaker was Deadwood Dick, Junior, and the other was his homely but sterling pard, Pete Parrot.

They were on foot, and had come some distance across a rather barren plain for the purpose their few quoted remarks have revealed. They had— But, the story will unfold.

Deadwood Dick was not mistaken; danger, if not death, awaited them in the motte.

Under cover of the trees, as yet out of sight, was a band of six horsemen, all heavily bearded fellows, each with a mask half-covering his face.

They were armed to the teeth, and had been for some time watching the plain in the direction from which Pete Parrot and Dick were now approaching, and had just sighted them.

"There they come," spoke one, evidently the leader.

"Yes, that's them," another said. "We've got 'em now, Captain Blue-beard."

"You are right, Lieutenant Whiskers; and they are walking to their doom. We will take care of them."

"Shall we go out and hurry them up a bit?"

"No; plenty of time. Keep silent all, till they are nearer; then we'll show ourselves."

"And I opine they will find it don't always pay to rush to the aid of beauty in distress. The gal's game was a cute one, but she seemed to forget it was Captain Blue-beard she was bucking against."

The captain laughed, at that, and all were silent.

Deadwood Dick and Pete Parrot were coming steadily on, their eyes fixed upon the cottonwoods.

Not until they were quite near did they see anything to support the suspicion Dick had indicated, but the truth was revealed to them in a sudden and startling manner when the mounted men sprung from cover.

Two of the horsemen were apart from the others, and each had a rifle at his shoulder covering the pards.

"Good-morning to you, Deadwood Dick and pard!" rung out the voice of Captain Blue-beard. "Don't attempt to draw a weapon; it will signal your death if you do. You are prisoners."

Dick and Pete had already recognized the folly of resisting.

"Well, what is your pleasure with us, strangers?" asked Dick. "This is quite a surprise."

"Hal hal! That is what we meant it should be. Lieutenant Whiskers," turning to that

worthy, at the same time pointing, "ride out there, you and another, and round them up."

The order was obeyed promptly, as, with weapons drawn, the lieutenant and the man nearest him dashed forth, a few long leaps of their horses carrying them to the rear of the pards, one from either side; and for the present, at least, thought of escape appeared useless.

The pards obeyed the order to step forward, and in a moment were face to face with Captain Blue-beard at the edge of the motte of cottonwoods.

"Well, it did not work, you have found," the masked captain observed.

"It seems to have worked only too well," responded Dick, as cheerfully as possible.

"You have it all your own way."

"You know what I refer to, curse you! Don't play the innocent. We know all about it. We know you had an appointment to meet Bessie Reynold here at this hour, but you have met us instead."

"Well?"

"Am I not right?"

"You claim that you are, anyhow."

The six horsemen were now around them, the two with rifles having closed in with the others.

To this time Pete Parrot had said nothing, save in a remark or two to Dick when the horsemen first showed themselves, but now he broke forth:

"An' we want to know what ye ar' goin' to do with us. Ef ye mean to rob us, git et done with an' let us go on our way; ef ye mean to kill us, then et will be a purty mean piece of business ef ye don't give us a chance fer our lives."

"More of your innocent playing; but it won't work. We'll give you a show, of course, but it has got to be on our own conditions, not yours."

"Let us hear the terms, then," demanded Deadwood Dick.

"First let me tell you just what we know, so that you can see there is no manner of bluff on our part."

"Go ahead."

"You and your pard came to Silver City for the purpose of hunting down Captain Blue-beard and his band."

"Which we don't admit!"

"Fools if you would, but we know it. You have been some days at Silver City, and yesterday you had a brief call from Bessie Reynold. Now, the chance we'll give you is just this: Tell us, in full, what that girl revealed to you, and we'll let you go free, provided you go away from here never to return."

"And fools we would be to do that, too. We refuse, point-blank, so go ahead and do your worst with us."

"That seals your fate; men, produce the ropes."

A couple of lariats were forthcoming immediately, each with a noose at the end.

In the same moment, and most unexpectedly, Dick and Pete Parrot leaped apart from each other, each diving under the belly of the nearest horse.

How they had planned and communicated their design, none could guess, but so they certainly had done, and no sooner had they disappeared than revolvers were heard to speak.

Out of their saddles rolled two men, and such was the surprise that not a shot was fired in return for some seconds. In fact, not until Dick and Pete were dashing away, not mounted, of course, but clinging to saddles and girths with their hands, running beside the stampeding horses.

Each went in an opposite direction.

Out blazed the rifles, then, after each of them, together with a volley of revolver-shots, and the horse which Pete had captured reared up, gave a final mighty leap, and was dead.

Pete was carried down with it, but did not

allow the horse to fall on him, and he took good care to shelter himself behind the carcass.

Dick fared scarcely any better, for his horse was wounded and it would be only a question of minutes when it, too, would fall. He could scarcely manage to keep it between him and his foes, while to use his weapons at the same time was out of the question.

Captain Blue-beard was wild in his anger.

"Cut them down!" he roared. "Give them no chance at all, curse them! Two of my men must be avenged!"

"Look out for yourself, ye varmint!" shouted Pete Parrot.

And with his words he sent a bullet that gave the masked captain about as close a call as he had ever had in his life.

This drew their fire upon Pete, for a half-minute or so, but, seeing that he was not to be hit, the now thoroughly aroused and enraged border bandits turned all their attention to Deadwood Dick.

They were still four against one when they started in Dick's direction, but in almost the same moment another saddle was emptied.

Pete Parrot had taken careful aim over the carcass, and could hardly have missed.

As this man fell, Captain Blue-beard jerked his horse to a stop.

"That fellow first, men!" he thundered. "His life shall pay for this; we'll burn him at the stake! Charge!"

They did so, but grim fate had not done dealing with them yet, it would seem. The instant they wheeled, Deadwood Dick let go the plunging horse he had been using for a bulwark, and resting his deadly revolver over his arm, pulled the trigger.

Out of the saddle tumbled yet another of the masked band.

Never, perhaps, had such a remarkable fight been fought.

"Come on, cuss ye!" yelled Pete, from his place of defense. "I'm good fer what's left of ye! See how *this* feels!"

He fired again, as he shouted; but, having to take care not to expose himself too much, he missed, though the bullet was too close to the head of Captain Blue-beard to be pleasant.

Both drew rein on the instant, firing where Pete's head had been seen, and had the target been there still one of the bullets would have found its billet, beyond question, for it tore the skin of the dead horse exactly where Pete had sighted.

It certainly looked as if the weaker side must win; now, for even as they were firing at Pete, or the place where he was known to be, Deadwood Dick tried another shot.

His bullet tore away a tuft of cloth from the shoulder of Lieutenant Whiskers.

"Curse our luck!" cried that fellow.

"Captain, we're dead men!"

"We will be, if we don't get out of here," the response.

Another shot from each defender decided them, and putting spurs to the flanks of their frightened horses, they dashed away; but they were not by any means out of danger, for a bullet from Deadwood Dick's revolver struck the horse of the captain, and the animal fell forward on its neck.

Captain Blue-beard gave a leap from the saddle as the horse went down, lighting upon his feet.

Deadwood Dick was running toward him, firing as he came.

Dick could have killed the fellow, now, but he hoped to catch him alive. He was not satisfied with the victory as it was; he wanted it doubly complete.

He fired wide of the mark, but a shot from the captain came so close as to check him, and another from the lieutenant, a second later, stung the skin between his left arm and his body.

"Down, boy! down!" yelled Pete Parrot,

who, in his excitement, had leaped onto the carcass that had served him so well. "You ar' a goner ef ye don't, by ther great hokuspokus."

Pete, by this dodge, drew a couple of shots to himself, which in all probability saved Deadwood Dick's life, for Dick had run into danger at close quarters without a thing to shield his person, and now realizing it, he dropped flat upon the sand, as Pete returned the fire.

Meantime the lieutenant had not been idle. Wheeling, he had swooped down and captured one of the riderless horses, and with it dashed back again to where his captain was, he, too, having thrown himself upon his face on the ground. The captain leaped to his feet and into the saddle, and they were off like the wind, with a parting shot from Pete Parrot.

## CHAPTER II.

### ACCUSED OF MURDER.

"Go it, ye varmints!" Pete Parrot yelled, firing the last shot he had. "Hooray fer our side, Dicky, boy!"

He waved his hat wildly with one hand and his revolver with the other, and fairly jumped up and down to express the more fully his delight.

"Hurrah!" echoed Dick, leaping lightly to his feet and running forward. "I wonder what they think of *that*? Wasn't that done beautifully? I never thought we'd come out alive."

"No more did I, boy, and that's gospel."

"Me, too, you bet!"

It was a third voice that chipped in, and on Pete's shoulder was perched Poll Parrot, his bird comrade!

The parrot had pulled herself out of his coat-pocket by hook and claws, and had taken her accustomed place upon his right shoulder.

The pards laughed heartily as they shook hands in congratulation.

"I had fergot all about you, Poll, in ther scrimmage," said Pete, in a half apology.

"Haven't we had a bully time!" croaked the bird.

At which Dick and Pete burst out in hearty laughter.

"Yes, a bully time!" answered Pete, "but let us see jest what the game-bag holds."

The pards advanced to where the nearest victim of the fight lay.

Rolling him over, they discovered that he was beardless, which was not a little to their surprise, at first.

"Scorch me ef I didn't shoot ther whiskers right off'n him!" cried Pete.

"They are off, anyhow," agreed Dick. "It is about as I suspected, and this is the proof."

"What did you suspect?"

"That they were all in disguise. They looked too much alike, and all had on clothes of the same kind. Ever see this fellow before?"

"Never, pard."

The dead man was a fellow about thirty-five years of age, with a villainous face.

Dick searched his pockets, but found absolutely nothing save a little tobacco in a bit of paper.

"Further proof," Dick observed.

"Proof that he chawed terbacky?" asked Pete, humorously.

"Yes, that, and that all were in a thorough disguise. We won't find any more on the others."

"Wal, that's cute! It goes ter show they have a rendyvoo in which they hev put off their reg'lar dry-goods and put on these hyer."

"That's it."

Dick was right; they searched the other bodies with no more success, save on one point. The last man they came to they recognized as a fellow they had seen once or twice during their stay in Silver City. This

was no surprise to them, but it was satisfying.

The sound of a horse's hoof-strokes now fell upon their ears.

Both looked quickly up, their hands falling naturally upon the little guns at their hips, which they had shouted from the cartridge-belts of the dead outlaws.

There seemed no danger this time, however, for the rider who approached them was a woman, and as she came nearer they recognized her as Miss Bessie Reynold, the girl who had appointed to meet them here.

When she came up a cry of horror escaped her.

"Heavens!" she gasped. "What does it mean?"

"Et means thar's been a scrimmage hyar," explained Parrot Pete.

"In which we had a hand," added Deadwood Dick, lifting his hat to the young lady.

"Not you two only!" she cried.

"Count me in," sung out Polly, from her perch on Pete's shoulder.

The young woman stared for an instant in alarm, on hearing the bird speak so plainly, but the next moment she smiled.

"Well, I am glad you came off so well," she said, to Dick. "I came like the wind, to warn you, as soon as I got free, but I would have been far too late, as this scene plainly proves."

"I opine ye would," agreed Pete.

"Then you have been a prisoner?" Dick inquired.

"Yes, sir, at the hands of this same band of cutthroats, and in my own home at that."

"What was their object in making you their prisoner?"

"That they might ambush you and kill you, and so defeat me in my object, if they knew what it was."

"Do you think they did know?"

"I cannot be sure of that."

"Well, they made a botch of the business, I am happy to say, and we are met here after all, as agreed."

"But, it will be useless, now, sir, for me to look for aid from you. These men will certainly kill you if you remain in this part of the country."

"They haven't made a very good beginning at it," remarked Dick, grimly.

"But they will be all the more determined."

"See if you know any of these, Miss Reynold."

The girl rode from one to the other of the bodies, looking at each in turn, finally reporting that she had never seen any of them before, to her knowledge.

"Well, let us have your story," said Dick. "I can well believe it is important, now that all this has grown out of it, which I assume to be the case."

"You are right. But, why came you here on foot?"

"We thought we would draw less attention in coming out of Silver City, that was the reason."

"I ought to have told you I intended to ask you to accompany me to our cabin, where I would introduce you to my poor father."

"How far as it?"

"Six miles."

"We can walk there, so your plans need not be upset."

"Oh! if you only will do that. Let us go at once, and I can tell you the story as well as we go along."

They set forward immediately.

"Let me repeat the little I told you yesterday, since your friend was not by at the time," the young woman began. "I said my father's life and my safety are in danger, and that father has a rich mine which some villainous men are eager to get hold upon."

"And you asked me to meet you, that

you might tell me more, with a view to my aiding you."

"Yes. Well, father is growing old, is in poor health, and I greatly fear he will be put out of the way, and that I will be left without a friend in the world. I am pleading with him to sell the mine to a responsible party, but he will not do so. He thinks he will soon get better of his malady, when he will himself open out the mine more fully, and so get a bigger price for the property."

"But your opinion is that he can never get well."

"You guess aright, sir. He is doomed. He is daily failing, and it is only a question of a few months at most."

"A plain and simple story, Miss Reynold; but, it is not so clear what you require of me."

"I am now coming to that. I want you to add your voice to mine in trying to persuade father to sell the property to my lover for a reasonable sum. Mr. Wiltner can pay eleven thousand dollars, but no more, for that is all the money he has in the world."

"Et ain't likely he's got any out of ther world," remarked Pete, aside.

"He may have, sir," with earnest simplicity. "Many persons, poor in the world, have treasure in Heaven. I certainly hope my father has."

Pete, abashed, said nothing further on that line.

"It is a small sum, for a mine, if the mine is good for anything," remarked, Dick, keeping to the trail. "What does your father think it is worth?"

"Five hundred thousand, at least, sir."

"A trifling difference."

"But, do you not see? Mr. Wiltner and I are engaged."

"I suppose you must be, but engaged is not married. What has your father to say on that head?"

"Why, it is with his consent, but he won't allow the mine to go out of his own hands. He means to leave it to me, of course, but he is so sure of getting well he has not yet made his will."

"And what do you suppose I can do toward leading him to change his mind in the matter?"

"He will respect your view more than that of any man living, sir."

"You talk now as though he must know me well."

Before she could rejoin, an exclamation from Pete Parrot called attention to a horseman who was coming toward them from the opposite direction, running his horse at its best speed.

They watched him, making passing remarks, until, when he had come nearer, the young woman suddenly cried out:

"Heavens! it is Paul Young!"

"And who is Paul Young?" asked Deadwood Dick.

"A man I hate! He is Fred Wiltner's rival for my hand, and our worst foe."

"He is the man, then, against whom you want to protect your father, yourself, and the property? Say quick, for here he is."

"Yes, yes, he is the—"

"Miss Reynold!" the man exclaimed, jerking rein suddenly on recognizing her. "I came after you, upon your trail, as fast as Pedro could carry me. Your father—that is to to say—My God! how can I break the news to you?"

He was white to the lips, and the young woman seemed ready to faint.

"Tell me the worst, instantly!" she commanded, huskily. "Anything were better than this torture."

"He is ill—he is worse—he is—"

"Do you mean to say my father is dead, Paul Young?"

"God knows I tried to break it gently, Bessie; I tried to break—"

"Enough, hypocrite! There is only one

thing more you can tell me, and that I can guess. You will say he has been murdered."

"It is true, true. I found him half-way from the cabin to the mine, with a knife buried deep in his back. The body was still warm. Then I sought you, and finding your trail, came on—"

"Stop! stop!"

The girl had drawn herself up, and sharp was her command.

"Deadwood Dick, Junior," turning to Dick, at the same time pointing at the man who had brought her the terrible news, her voice cold and steely in its intensity; "if this man's story be true, then he himself is the murderer! I bid you arrest him for the crime!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE BENEFIT OF THE DOUBT.

AT mention of the name of Deadwood Dick the man's hand was inclined to seek a weapon, while he looked at the young detective in a startled manner.

Dick's hand, too, made the same move, which probably had the effect to check the other, and thus they remained while the girl uttered, vehemently, the terrible accusation, and gave her command.

Turning her eyes suddenly upon the girl, Paul Young cried reproachfully:

"Bessie!"

"I mean it!" she hotly declared.

"What say you, sir?" Deadwood Dick demanded, sternly.

"Say? What *can* I say? I am as innocent as the young lady herself, sir."

Each had now a hand upon a gun at his hip, and their eyes met, keen and fearless, searchingly.

"You heard my orders."

"I heard, sir."

"And I have power to arrest."

"I must warn you not to make the attempt, sir."

Their eyes had not for a second been removed from each other's, and there followed now a moment of silence, suddenly broken.

"Holy smoke!" cried Pete Parrot, leaping away from the accused man's horse as it made a vicious bite at him. Rip sech a ornery brute as that, anyhow! I wouldn't ride et ter punch cows!"

Pete, in order to aid Dick, had reached out his hand to lay hold on the bit.

"Don't try it again, my friend," warned the driver, but without looking away from Dick. "You are lucky you didn't get a crushed arm. Well Deadwood Dick, what are you going to do about it? I pledge you my word I am innocent; I warn you not to try to arrest me."

"Your word!" cried Miss Reynold, her lip curling in contempt.

"Have I ever broken my word with you?" Young asked. "On my honor I am innocent, Bessie."

"And your honor! Dare to address me so familiarly again, and I will take my revenge upon you here and now, though you kill me at the same time."

"I go," spoke the man, in a subdued tone, and as he said it his horse began to back away, as if horse and rider were one. "If you fire after me, kindly avoid killing my horse."

"Stop!"

Deadwood Dick gave the order, and like a flash his hand came up to a level, weapon ready cocked.

Quick as he had been, however, the other had been none the less so, and gun looked at gun, the horse still continuing to back.

"Be warned, sir!" the fearless rider urged.

"And you, Bessie Reynold, remember the promise I once gave you. You shall yet have proofs for the great wrong you do me."

Like a flash the horse turned, and was dashing away.

With a muttered imprecation, Pete Parrot whipped out a gun and raised his arm to fire, but the young woman struck his hand down with her whip.

"What did ye do that fer?" demanded Pete, whose bullet did no more harm than to flick up the sand a few paces away. "Ef Dicky was goin' to let ther varmint git off, I meant ter try him one fer luck, anyhow. What *did* ye do et fer, miss?"

"I saw your companion had a reason for allowing him to go."

Dick had, indeed, lowered his revolver while the man was speaking, but the expression of the girl's face, and nothing of fear, was what had prompted him.

"An' I thort ye was skart, Dicky," Pete declared.

Dick smiled.

"You ought to know me better than that, Pete," he said. "No, it was nothing of fear, but I believe this man innocent of the crime."

"Do you think so?" the girl eagerly demanded.

"Yes, I do."

"Why?"

"His words, his manner, his general bearing; hard to explain it down fine."

The retreating horseman had by this time become a mere speck in a cloud of dust in the distance.

"Well, you may be right, but it is hard to believe. But, come, let us go forward in haste. Oh! if you were only mounted!"

"You are in haste to reach home," said Dick. "Well, we can follow the trail, miss, so you may dash on ahead if you choose. We will be there as soon as Shank's mares can carry us."

"Then I will leave you, for my heart is breaking with grief. *Adios.*"

With that pretty Spanish word of leave-taking, and a graceful motion of the hand, she was away.

Dick and Pete watched her in silence for some moments.

"Wull, pard, what do yer think of ther hull dern affair, anyhow?" Pete first voiced.

"I hardly know what to think about it, Pete, that's the truth," Dick made reply. "There's a knot here to be worked out. That lady wasn't so sure of her man as she thought."

"Ye think not?"

"I know it. If her conviction had been firm not only would she have allowed you to blaze away at him, but she would have tried some shots in his direction herself. There is a mystery here as big as a house. I believe the fellow innocent, and I think he is 'white.'"

"Wull, you have the best head, Dicky, when et comes down to hard thinkin', so I take yer word fur et anyhow."

It had not taken the young woman long to ride out of sight, and they continued on their way at a quick walk, following the trail, which was so plain it could not be missed.

Eventually they reached their destination.

Just around a spur of low hills, and of a sudden the whole landscape before them was changed.

Here was a perfect garden spot in a valley with a stream in its bottom, and not far away, in a cluster of trees, which had once been a thick motte, perhaps, stood a cabin.

They knew the place at a glance, and even if they had been uncertain, there by the door stood the pony the young lady had recently been riding, the bridle thrown loosely over a post. No other sign of life was anywhere visible.

"Somethin's wrong hyar," declared Pete.

"I feel it myself," agreed Dick.

"What kin et be?"

"We know a murder has been committed."

"Yes, but it is more than that, pard. I feel danger on ther breeze."

"Then have your guns handy and keep your eyes wide open. This is going to be a life or death game, before we get done with it."

Making sure of their weapons, they went on to the place where the pony stood, and thence to the door of the cabin, which was open, and looked in. No one was there, and a call brought no response.

"I have it, now," said Dick.

"What is et? I'm gittin' skart—fer that gal."

"Why, you know that fellow Young said he had found the body half way between the cabin and the mine."

"So he did. But, pard, whar's the mine? And why didn't ther gal ride thar instead of leavin' her critter hyer to ther post? I'm puzzled."

"And your last question puzzles me. The mine must be in the hills, one side or the other of the valley, and there must be a trail leading to it; but, why the girl left her pony here I don't see."

"Hands up, curse you!"

Sudden and startling the command.

Pete and Dick wheeled around instantly, and their hands went up, but weapons were in them.

They were in desperate mood, now, and if it must be another fight they were ready to take their chances in the fray. They had dodged and sprung apart, as they turned.

In the same second a report was heard, and a bullet sped within a hair's breadth of Deadwood Dick's head.

At the corner of the cabin, glaring at them, was a masked man.

"Drop that gun!" cried Deadwood Dick, so quickly that it all took place as a single event. "Drop it! or I will bore you!"

"Ye may as well bore away, then, fer I don't mean ter 'bey," the masked man coolly growled. "I mean ter 'venge ther death of Sid Reynold, ef et takes my own life ter do et."

Dick or Pete either one could have killed the fellow ere he had said the half of that, but his words saved him.

The man was preparing to shoot again, with utter disregard.

"You were Reynold's friend, you say?" demanded Dick, quickly. "Hold your shoot just a second."

"His friend! We was pards like brothers, we was, in the old days, and I'm goin' to venge his death ef it takes my last drop of blood ter do et—"

"Well, don't begin on us, then, for we are on the same trail. We are looking for his daughter, and intend to hunt down the rascal who killed the old man. You are on the wrong scent."

"Bet your life!" sung out Poll Parrot.

The bird had once more made her way out of Pete's pocket, and now climbed to his shoulder.

Dick and Pete lowered their weapons, seeing the masked man prepare to put away his gun, and this action on their part led the stranger to thrust his revolver under his belt.

"Actions speaks ez loud as words, sometimes," he said, stepping forward, "an' your actions is right out 'loud now, fer sure. I'm like ther 'mortal' George, first in war an' first in peacc. Et's lucky you ar' alive youngster," to Dick.

"You gave me a close shave."

"Et was your fault. I warned you to put up yer hands, but ye didn't 'bey.'"

"On the contrary, I did obey, promptly. We took you for Captain Blue-beard, and we knew it was certain death to fall into his hands, while we had one chance in a thousand if we were quick."

The man had now removed his mask.

He was far past the prime of life, but still had a rugged look and a keen eye.

"An' who is Captain Blue-beard?" he demanded.

"If you could find out, sir, you would do

this part of the country a service," was Dick's reply.

"You must be a stranger hyer," observed Pete.

"Yes, so I am."

"Well, this is no time to parley," reminded Dick. "If you are with us, we won't fool any time here. We want to find Bessie Reynold, the daughter of your old friend. You have not seen her, of course?"

"I haven't; didn't know he had a gal."

"You didn't know it?"

"No, sir."

"More mystery, then. But time to talk after we have acted. Which way did you come here?"

"Down through ther pass over thar in ther hills. Right at ther edge of the bottom I kem upon ther body of my old pard, hardly cold yet, an' I kem on hyer with blood in me eye."

"You had never been here before?"

"Never."

"Then how did you know this was his cabin?"

Dick still had a little suspicion of the old fellow, it would seem, by this.

"How did I know et? Why, I got a regular description of et over to Bullion Bar where I stopped last night. But, ef you ar' friends of poor Sid's, fetch ther pony and let's go out and bring ther body in."

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### SILVER CITY SAL. THE MESSAGE.

It was certain that Miss Reynold was nowhere about the cabin, and as no trace of her could be found, Dick and his pard fell in with the old man's plans.

Dick lifted the rein from over the post and hung it on his arm, and thus they set forth, the old stranger leading the way, and as they went along they gave their new pard an understanding of all that had taken place.

The old fellow's name, it appeared, was Gil Bliss, and he was a plainsman from the Wyoming country.

When they came to the place where the body had been, it was no longer there.

Here was another surprise, one not counted on.

"What does this hyer mean?" demanded Parrot Pete. "First we can't find ther gal, and now the dead man has took himself off too."

"It means that we are staggering around in the midst of one of the worst tangles we ever got into," declared Deadwood Dick. "We have neither head nor tail of the matter."

"And et's a tangle what's goin' ter make us put on our specks ter get et out," declared the old scout and ranger. "That body was hyer not half an hour ago, and now whar is et? Who's took et? And for why? Pard, what is goin' to be done about this business?"

"We will return to Silver City and arouse the town," said Dick. "They will turn out to a man, for Bessie Reynold."

"Ha! ther gal. I had forgot her again, not knowin' he had a gal, as I said."

Hoof-strokes fell upon their ears at that moment.

They looked quickly in the direction whence the sound came, and saw a woman riding rapidly toward them.

"Thar she is now!" cried Pete.

"You bet!" the parrot.

"I'm not so sure," said Dick. "This woman has a mask, you see. What new complication is springing up? My head begins to feel dizzy."

The rider was coming like the wind, from the direction of the Reynold cabin, and as she came up she drew rein, stopping short. Then it was that, spite of her mask, she was recognized.

It was Deadwood Dick who penetrated her disguise.

"Have you found her?" was the woman's very first question.

"No, Sal, we have not," Dick answered.

"Ha! you recognize me?"

"Certainly."

"Darn me ef et ain't Silver City Sal fer sure!" cried Pete Parrot.

"Yes, but I did not care to be recognized by everybody, so I put on rough attire and the mask."

She was clad in a very plain gown, greatly unlike anything she had ever appeared in at Silver City, where one of the points of her life was to excel in matters of dress.

"How did you hear about this?" Dick inquired.

"Paul Young brought the news to the camp, and I came off at once to comfort Bessie."

"Yes, but I mean, how did you learn that she is missing?"

"Why—that is—her pony, you know."

Dick noticed that she hesitated, and her explanation did not satisfy him at all.

"Oh, yes, I did not think of that," he accepted. "You missed her at the cabin, where you thought she would be, and coming on here and finding her pony in our possession, riderless—"

"Yes, yes," the woman interrupted, "that was just it."

The situation was quickly talked over, and Pete and the old scout being unable to pick up the trail by which the body had been taken away from the scene of the crime, they all set forth on their return to the cabin.

"Poor Bessie!" sighed Silver City Sal, as they turned from the spot. "I wonder where she can be?"

"That is for us to find out," answered Deadwood Dick.

"You are determined to rescue her then?"

"I am."

"And you will allow me to aid you in the hunt?"

"Certainly, if you want to; the more help the better. She must be found, and also her father's murderer."

"Have you any idea who killed him?"

"I believe it to have been Captain Blue-beard."

"Ah! And have you any idea who Captain Blue-beard is?"

"Not the slightest. Have you?"

"It is dangerous to voice suspicions, sir."

"Yet, if you have such a suspicion it is wrong to withhold it at a time like this."

"No, no, I have no suspicion; that is, were I to name any person I could not tell you why. But, we must learn who he is, working together."

"And we certainly will."

On their arrival at the cabin nothing in the situation was changed, and after another and more thorough search around for the missing girl, they closed the cabin up and were about to set forward for Silver City, when a great band of horsemen came in sight.

"Gee-whiz!" cried out Pete Parrot. "Hyer comes ther hull camp!"

"Half of it at any rate," agreed Dick.

"It is what I expected," said Silver City Sal. "Paul Young's story made a great stir there."

Down the slope the horsemen came, like cavalry making a charge, into the valley, and on and up to the trees where the cabin stood.

One of the leaders was Paul Young himself.

"I told you he is innocent," said Dick, aside to Pete Parrot,

"So ye did, boy. He's either that, or he is makin' ther boldest play ever played in ther world."

"He is innocent, depend on it."

Many of the men were out of their saddles

in a moment, and Deadwood Dick and those with him were surrounded and eagerly plied with questions.

"Bessie Reynold missing!" cried Paul Young.

"Yes, sir, mysteriously missing," assured Dick.

"But, sir, she was with you when I met you; how is it?"

"If I knew how it is, Mr. Young, it would not be mysterious. She was on her pony, you remember, while I and my pard were on foot, and being anxious to reach her father she left us and dashed on ahead."

"And when you got here?"

"She was gone, as I said. The pony was standing by the post there, the bridle over the post, but the young woman was nowhere to be found." And Dick gave them a full account of all that had happened.

"It is more than strange," Paul Young mused.

"Have you no explanation to offer, Mr. Young?" asked Silver City Sal.

"Not the least, Sal. It is the greatest mystery I ever ran up against in my life."

"Do you think Blue-beard can have carried her away?"

"With most of his band dead? I think not. It might be so, but I think he is most concerned for the safety of his own precious skin, just now."

"Which way did he take off, after you wiped them out, Deadwood Dick?" another man of the crowd asked.

"To the south," Dick answered.

"That explains it, then, for that's the direction of the desert."

"Have you looked well around here?" asked another.

"We haven't been over ther ground wi' sandpaper yet, but we've done almost everything else, tryin' to pick up ther trail," answered Pete.

Gradually the talk resolved into a regular council of war—so to call it, and while they were still undecided what ought to be done, yet another horseman was seen coming.

"Who's that 'ar?" asked the man who first sighted him.

All attention was turned to the new-comer in a second, but no one offered the answer till he came nearer.

"Why, it looks like Fred Wiltner," Silver City Sal was the first to speak.

"And so it is, too," agreed Paul Young.

"Wonder how the word reached him?"

"Somebody must have gone to tell him. Or, maybe he came up to the camp to get his mail."

"Does he live out of town?" asked Dick.

"Yes; he has a claim a couple of miles to the south, and puts in part of his time there."

By this time the man himself was at hand.

He was a strong-looking, sun-browned fellow of thirty, good-looking, with a face that bespoke the courage of a lion, if courage was called for. He was just the man for an emergency, any one would have said.

"What is this I hear?" he demanded, "Sidney Reynolds dead—murdered?"

"Yes, and his daughter missing," answered Silver City Sal. "We are all at a loss what to do, Fred."

"Bessie missing! Tell me all about it, quick!"

The particulars were given.

"Five hundred dollars and no questions to the man who will find her!" the unhappy lover cried, urgently. "She *must* be found. Depend on it, she has not disappeared of her own will."

"Do you suspect any one, sir?" asked Deadwood Dick.

"No, no one, unless—"

He glared around at the faces about him.

"Speak out, sir," Dick urged. "Let us sift the matter. If we accuse an innocent person he can clear himself."

"Unless this dog," Wiltner finished his

sentence, pointing with index straight at Paul Young. "I would not consider him any too good to steal the lady, to gain her from me, and if he would do that—"

"Not another word!" rung out the voice of the accused man.

He had pressed forward, mounted, and faced his accuser with unflinching eyes, his hand on the grip of a gun.

"What will you do?" demanded Wiltner, his hand similarly placed. "Come, now, what will you do?"

"I will show you, curse you! Clear the way, men, and let us have a space of twenty yards in which to settle this thing."

"Ha! you want to fight, do you. All right; I will oblige you, if you are so anxious to shuffle off the mortal coil. Clear the way, men, and I will satisfy him."

"No! no!" cried Silver City Sal. "This must not, must not be, gentlemen! I beg of you not to fight! Wait, at least, till you have recovered Miss Reynold, for if you love her you ought both to work for her safety, even though you fight for her possession afterward."

"The lady is right," urged Deadwood Dick, who, mounted upon Bessie Reynold's pony, worked his way between them. "This is no time to allow anything to interfere with the important business before us."

"You heard what he said to me," cried Young, wrathfully.

"Certainly."

"Well, I am a man, and I will not stand it. Fred Wiltner, it is your life or mine. Defend yourself!"

As he spoke, Young's arm came up with the quickness of lightning, and he fired as soon as it reached the proper level, but, a touch from Dick's hand sent the bullet wide of the mark.

Reaching out with his other arm, Dick was just in time to do the same with Wiltner's weapon.

"Hold on!" Dick cried. "This is too hot for me! If you *must* fight, go out there and get at it in a fair way; that was a snap advantage, Mr. Young."

"I had warned him," Paul growled.

The others had scattered, to a great extent, and Dick, Young and Wiltner were the only three left on the spot where the crowd had been.

Silver City Sal now quickly ran back to her place, coming between the two men on the side opposite Dick.

"Men, you must stop!" she urged. "Both of you owe your lives to brave Deadwood Dick—at least you do, Mr. Wiltner, so let the matter drop for the present. We must find Bessie and learn what has become of her father's body."

"What! The body missing, too?"

"Yes; can't be found."

"What can it mean? Young, let's solve this and fight afterwards. Let's go into this thing with one purpose, and not let our enmity come in the way."

"Nobly said," remarked Silver City Sal.

"I'll do it if you will hold your insulting tongue," responded Young, doggedly. "I am hot and quick, and I can't stand such words from you—what is more, I won't. Hold your tongue, then, and I'm with you."

"Hooray!" cheered the crowd, glad to have the suspense broken.

At that moment something white came fluttering down from the open air above where they stood.

It could be seen that it was a sheet of paper, and as it came nearer eager hands were raised to secure it. It was not known who had called attention to it; all seemed to have seen it at once.

Silver City Sal was the one to get it.

"A message!" she cried.

"Read it!" roared the crowd.

"And from Captain Blue-beard, too."

"Read it! read it!"

"CITIZENS OF SILVER CITY:—

"While I do not pretend to know who killed Sidney Reynolds, you had better give some attention to a fellow who spells his name PAUL YOUNG. Can he give an account of his movements or prove an alibi?"

"CAPTAIN BLUE-BEARD."

Every eye was instantly fastened upon the accused man, who met only the gaze of Deadwood Dick in return.

"Speak fer yerself, Paul Young," cried one man, hoarsely. "This accusin' is none of our doin', ye know. Clear yerself, an' we'll help ye cram ther lie down Blue-beard's throat."

"There is only one thing I can say, men of Silver City," spoke Paul, fearlessly. "I am innocent of the crime. I suppose I am the one who first discovered it, and I went to Silver City and gave the alarm. Surely, you do not mean to give this letter weight against me."

## CHAPTER V.

### A SPEEDY TRIAL. ENTRAPPED.

A CHILL seemed to have come over the whole crowd.

What terrible scene was yet to be enacted there under the shade of those fine trees in that peaceful valley?

It was a trying moment for Deadwood Dick. He believed in his heart Paul Young was innocent, and yet could he prove him so? He certainly could not; three voices now were against him.

First the charge made by Miss Reynold herself, then that by Wiltner, and now this the last and worst of all, perhaps, from the outlaw whose name was a terror to all the country round. It was a trying moment, and Dick waited to let events shape themselves.

A leader was needed, and the duty fell naturally upon Fred Wiltner.

No one spoke till he first broke the silence, which he did after he had waited some minutes, looking around at the others.

"Boys," he said, "I see you are looking to me to take this matter in hand, but I must decline to do it. You understand the reason. I hate this man as I hate a viper."

"Then who shall be judge?" cried one man.

"Silver City Sal!" another shouted.

"You mean to try me?" asked Paul, turning pale in spite of himself.

"Why not? Ye ain't above et, aire ye?"

"Not at all. I object to the person named, however, as judge."

"On what grounds?" asked Sal herself.

"You are a woman, for one thing, and that is enough. I want a man, and one who is neither my friend nor my foe."

"Deadwood Dick!"

"I decline," spoke up Dick, quickly.

"How will this old man do?"

He indicated Gil Bliss, the old scout.

"Who are you, old man?" the accused inquired.

"I'm Gil Bliss, old-time friend and pard to Sidney Reynold," was the answer. "I'm on ther trail o' vengeance, rough shod, too."

"But, you can give me a fair hearing?"

"Jest as white as snow, young man."

"Then act as judge."

The little details were quickly arranged, and the trial was speedily opened in the good old "necktie" fashion.

Rough denizens, for the most part, these men of Silver City.

"My story is a simple one, and strictly true," the prisoner said in his own behalf.

"You all know where my ranch is, a couple of miles below here. Well, at an early hour this morning I saw Captain Blue-beard and his band moving up on the other side in the direction of this place. After breakfast I got to thinking about it, and made up my

mind to come over and see if everything was right. I found the poor old man dead and Bessie gone. I took her trail, and met her coming back this way just this side of the cottonwood motte between here and Silver City. I rode right on and gave the alarm."

"Can you prove that you met ther gal?" asked the judge?

"I can; these two men were with her."

As he spoke he indicated Dick and Pete Parrot.

"That's gospel, supported Dick, "and he told his story about the same as now."

"And is that all you can say, prisoner?" the judge asked.

"That is the whole story, sir."

"Has anybody else anything to say?"

"Yes, I have," now put in Wiltner. "I have heard Miss Reynold say she had a fear of this fellow. He has tried time and again to steal her affection away from me. He knew the young lady is my promised wife, and may have become desperate. She is heir to her father's mine, you know. It is probable that he has the mine in his eye rather than the girl, and has taken this step in order to make sure of its falling into her possession. You all saw the cowardly snot he tried upon me just now. Add two and two, and what is the sum?"

Young was watching him with flashing eyes.

"Then that mine is not your own object, eh?" he asked, coolly.

"No, sir! I wish the mine had never been discovered. I love the lady for herself alone."

"And so do I, Fred Wiltner. Like you, I wish the find had never been made. One thing I will remind you of, just here: I sought her hand *before* the mine was discovered; *you* did not appear upon the scene till *afterward*. This may not signify anything, however. Of one thing I am sure: I would have won her had you remained out of the field with your lying tongue—"

"Have a care!"

"I care for nothing. I mean just what—"

"Order in this hyer court!" bellowed the judge. "Is thar any more evidence ergainst this hyer prisoner?"

"It seems to me you have had evidence enough," growled Wiltner. "Many a man has been hanged on less. His own statements have condemned him."

"Not when Gil Bliss held ther posish of judge," the old scout declared, firmly. "Do I hear nothin' more?"

The evidence was apparently all in.

"Sech bein' ther case," Judge Lynch proceeded to sum up, taking his time to give due weight to his words, "it is about my turn to chip in with my say-so. Ther man what killed Sid Reynold has got ter swing, I hev swear'd et, but, *we haven't got him yit.*"

"Hooray!"

A portion of the crowd gave a cheer.

"No, we haven't got him yit, pards. This hyer young man, I believe, is as innocent as I be myself; anyhow, his word is as good as ther man's what charges him. Et looks ter me as ef this hyer Captain Blue-beard, whoever he may be, is ther cuss we want, an' we want him bad. Prisoner, you kin go. Pitch in, now, an' show folks ther old man's ver-dick was right."

"Hooray! Hooray!"

"I thank you, sir," said Young, earnestly. "You shall have the proof you ask for, if life is spared me."

"And in the mean time I shall not be idle," declared Wiltner. "I am going to push this investigation to the bitter end, no matter where the guilt is fastened. Look well to yourself, Paul Young."

The suspense was now broken, and the chill had passed from the hearts of the spectators.

Deadwood Dick now seized the opportunity to make a suggestion.

"Say, my friends," he drew attention.

"What aire et?" asked the recent Judge Lynch.

"That matter is now settled, and we must get down to business."

"And that immediately," echoed Paul Young. "Have you some plan that you can offer?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

Dick had all attention.

"It is this," he explained: "We had better divide ourselves into two companies. One to look for the missing lady, and the other to set out after the outlaws."

"A good idea."

So they all agreed.

"And, Mr. Young, you had better go in one company and Mr. Wiltner in the other. Can you agree to that, gentlemen?"

"We must agree to it, for the sake of the lady," answered Young, quickly. "Our first duty is to her. I am in favor of that plan."

"And so am I," acquiesced Wiltner, "provided I be allowed to take up the trail to find my promised wife. I claim that right, gentlemen, and insist on it."

"Take it," said Young, sullenly.

"Then it is all arranged," cried Dick. "Choose sides, now, and get down to work. My pard and I are going back to Silver City to get our horses, and we will fall in with the procession later."

"You say you are going back?" asked Silver City Sal.

"Yes; I will ride this pony in— Ha! a thought: Pete, you remain here, and I will bring your horses to you."

"Jest what I was goin' to nominate, pard," Pete declared. "I'll stay hyer and neighbor with our new pard, ef he don't kick ergainst et."

"I'm perfectly willin'," Mr. Bliss assured.

"Then I will accompany you to the city, sir," said Silver City Sal. "I want to have a talk with you."

"All right; we will be off, then."

So, taking leave of the rest of the company, they started off, going at a lively canter.

There was some preliminary small talk, and after a pause of some moments Sal asked:

"What did Bessie Reynold want with you yesterday, Mr. Bristol?"

"She asked a favor of me," Dick answered.

"What was it, please?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I want to know."

"Undoubtedly you do, but I cannot tell you what you ask unless you give me a reason for wanting to know. It would not be fair to Miss Reynold to betray her confidence, you see."

"Well, you are right, of course. I want to ask you if she mentioned me in any manner."

"She did not. Her business was of a strictly private nature."

"And she wanted your help in some way."

"She did."

"And that was where you set out for this morning. Do you think she was in earnest in what she said to you?"

"I have no reason to think otherwise."

"Has it not occurred to you that maybe it was she who led you into the trap set for you by Captain Blue-beard?"

Dick gave a start.

"Do you think that?" he demanded.

"It is a thought that has come to me, sir."

"Yes, but you must have some foundation for it, surely."

"Well, I have, but it is one unworthy of Miss Reynold, and I do not care to make it known to you."

"I insist upon knowing what it is, never-

theless. Not that I can believe there is anything in it, for I do not; but it may open the way to something."

"I am sorry now I spoke about it at all."

"Why?"

"It places me in a delicate position. I had no intention of revealing all to you, when I first spoke."

"Yes, but you need not hesitate about speaking your mind to me. If I would not betray Bessie Reynold's confidence to you, neither will I betray yours to any one else."

"You promise me that?"

"I do."

"Then I will tell you: Deadwood Dick, I love you."

Dick started, and looked hard at the pretty woman at his side, to find her face flushed and her eyes flashing.

"Say," he demanded, "have you had anything to do with the disappearance of Bessie Reynold?"

"I?"

"Yes."

"Why, no, to be sure not; why do you ask that?"

"Your confession led me to ask it. The same reason why you think she might have lured me out here to be killed, maybe—and yet I cannot grasp that."

"No, no; I have had nothing to do with it, Dick. But, I love you, and thinking she loved you too, I thought she was determined to steal you away from me, or else put you beyond my reach."

"The deuce!"

"Maybe it was a foolish thought, Dick, but love does a great many foolish things, you know. I am sure you will despise me for this confession I have made to you, but I could not help speaking. Do not think ill of me, for that would kill me."

"Say no more about it."

"And, Dick—"

"Well?"

"Do not arouse my jealousy, whatever you do. I believe if you were to do that, I could even kill you."

"I have no thought or intention of doing so, Miss Sally. If you feel the ailment coming on, don't get to shooting before you are sure of your case. Just come to me first."

"Yes, I promise you that, Dick."

"Here we are, coming to the motte where Pete and I had the jubilee with Captain Blue-beard and his band."

"And a wonderful fight it was! We will ride through, if you don't mind, instead of going around, and under the cover of the trees, where no one can see, I want you to seal your pledge with a kiss."

Dick looked again at this strange woman, but her peerless eyes were fairly beaming with love and swimming in tears of suppressed emotion.

"I certainly can't refuse you that favor, Silver City Sal, be you who or what you may," he declared.

"You will find that I am straight and right, Deadwood Dick."

"But you are a mighty strange girl."

"Maybe I am."

Her melting eyes met his again, and no more was said till they rode into the motte, when the woman drew close to Dick's side and stopped, opening her arms for his embrace. The moment he yielded, and their lips met, there was a crashing in the underbrush, and heavy hands fell upon them both. They were entrapped!

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE OUTLAWS' RETREAT. SURPRISE.

"SURRENDER!" ordered a rough, harsh voice. "If you resist we'll knife ye right here and now!"

"Great heavens!" gasped Silver City Sal. "We are captured by Blue-beard! I had no thought of danger here, Deadwood Dick, believe me."

"Do you swear that you did not betray me into this trap?" demanded Dick, having been torn from her embrace by force. "It has a suspicious look, Silver City Sal."

"Ther gal had nothin' ter do with et," growled one of the captors, of whom there were four, all rough fellows, thoroughly masked. "She is a prisoner ther same as yerself. Be easy on that."

There had not been the ghost of a chance for Dick to defend himself, and he was speedily bound, as was also the young woman.

"No, you greatly wrong me, Dick," the young woman declared. "How can you doubt me?"

"You cannot blame me for the thought, anyhow."

"No, and do not."

Having made them secure, the masked men took a hasty survey of the plain on every side of the cottonwoods.

There was no one in sight in any direction, and as soon as assured of that the ring-leader ordered a hasty departure, leading the way toward the south, where lay the desert.

"What do you intend doing with us?" asked Silver City Sal.

"Don't know what ther captain will do with you," was the answer. "He's goin' ter burn this hyer cuss."

"Then he shall burn us both."

"Mebby you'll think better of et when ye see ther fire."

"Never! It were far better to die with the man I love, than to live without him."

"Ha! ha! ha! So, ye ar' in love, aire ye, Silver City Sal? Well, yer livin' or dyin' won't make any difference in his case, not a bit. And mebbly ther captain will want ye to live."

"Villain! Were my hands free I would strike you!"

The girl's eyes flashed, as she turned upon the fellow, but her anger only evoked their captors to laughter.

Deadwood Dick was puzzled, greatly. He knew not what to make of the strange woman. He could not decide whether she was for him or against him, for he had strong suspicions in the latter direction.

He said little, but thought a good deal.

His mind got in a whirl, when he tried to gather in the whole matter of that morning and sift it. This he simply could not do.

There was no light anywhere. But, of two things he was confident, and these were—that Paul Young was an innocent man and that Bessie Reynold had not lured him, Dick, into a trap.

Mile after mile was laid behind, and for the most part silence was maintained all around.

The sandy plan had given place to a barren, basalt waste, where the horses left scarcely a mark that could be followed, and just ahead rose the basalt buttes, beyond which lay the burning desert.

"Where is your destination?" Dick finally inquired.

Upon his putting this question the leader drew rein, and all came to a stop.

"It is ahead in ther hills thar," was the answer, "and it is about time you and ther gal had yer blinkers blinded. We have a secret thar that is ter be guarded well."

"What's the difference, if you mean to burn me?"

"Orders is orders."

There was no help for it, so Dick had to submit, and in a few minutes his eyes had been effectually covered.

Then they pushed on.

Nothing was heard save the click! click! of the hoofs on the stony way, but presently a cooler air proved that they had entered into a defile among the hills.

Presently the trail took a downward tendency, and the air grew cooler still, till at length the animals splashed into water and

stopped to drink their fill before going further.

Then on, and in a little time the end was reached.

Here the prisoners were helped to dismount, and the bandages were removed from their eyes.

They found themselves in a semi-cavern, the whole front of which was open, the roof extending far back into the hill with a slope like that of a huge shell, another hill facing the opening.

Here was a veritable camp, on a small scale.

"Welcome to Captain Blue-beard's headquarters," the leader of their captors said with a wave of the hand.

"And are you Captain Blue-beard?" demanded Dick.

"Yes, I am Blue-beard."

"And when are you going to disposed of me?"

"When I have time I will attend to that, by burning you at the stake, sir."

"That is not a pleasing prospect. I have a proposition to make to you, if you are inclined to listen to it."

"I won't grant it, but I'll hear you."

"I'll fight this thing out with you, to the death. You will kill me or I will kill you."

"No, not any. We have had enough of your fighting. It is going to be a simple case of sweet revenge this time, my fine fellow. It will be sweet to hear your cries when the flames begin to lick."

"Inhuman wretch!" cried Silver City Sal. "Let me make a proposition. This young man and I will fight the four of you, and as many more as happen to be around here, if you will allow us to depart if we conquer. What do you say to it? It is better to die fighting, Dick."

"Decidedly."

"Ha! ha! That is all very nice, on your part, but we'd be fools to take the chances when we have got you where you can't do any harm. No, rest easy until I have time to attend to you. But you, Miss Sally—"

"Sir!"

"Exactly. If you will accept the honor of my rude quarters, you are welcome to retire there and rest."

"No, thank you," with scorn. "Where Deadwood Dick remains is good enough for me, and when you build his funeral pyre, just leave in it a space for me. We will die together."

"Not by a good deal, my beauty!"

With a laugh the man walked away, and the others having already gone, with the horses; Dick and Silver City Sal sat down on the ground.

"Well, we are in for it," said Dick.

"So it seems, Dick."

"At any rate, I am. There is a chance for you, if you are willing to take it. You ought to save yourself if you can."

"What is the chance?"

"Pretend to fall in with Captain Blue-beard's plans and try and escape from here."

"I will do that if you can see any chance for my saving you at the same time, otherwise I will not. We are going to stand or fall together, Deadwood Dick."

"All right, then, let's study the situation."

In the meantime the avenging and searching party from Silver City had divided itself into two companies, as Deadwood Dick had suggested.

At the head of one division was Fred Wiltner, while the other was taken in charge by Paul Young, on the call of most of the men who ranged themselves on that side, and little time was lost in getting down to work.

Wiltner deployed his men at once, to cover as much ground as possible, and

moved them forward toward the place where Sidney Reynold had been killed.

By so doing he hoped to pick up a trail that would solve the mysterious disappearance.

Young, at the same time, started down the valley, to go back on the trail the outlaw and his band must have made that morning when first seen by him and by following which he hoped to find their hiding-place.

When they had gone Pete Parrot and the old scout entered into a conversation chiefly made up of speculation regarding the mystery:

"Et gits darker an' darker at every step, that's what's ther matter," growled Pete.

"An' et was as dark as Yejip to begin with," commented the scout.

They were seated at a little distance from the door of the cabin, and neither noticed what was going on behind them.

Dark faces had appeared at the cabin door and motions were being made with reference to them. Then two masked men stole silently forth and approached them from behind.

Pete and the scout went right on talking, and as a considerable time had now elapsed, they were entirely alone, all the members of the searching parties having passed out of sight.

Nearer and nearer, inch by inch, the two skulking ruffians crept, with no more noise than a cat, nor as much, perhaps, each with a revolver held by the barrel.

A little nearer, and then they gave a leap at the same moment and their clubbed weapons fell.

Over went Pete Parrot and his companion, and if not insensible, so nearly dazed they hardly knew what had happened, and immediately the masked fellows threw themselves upon them and bound them, a third now assisting.

While they were doing this a strange, muffled voice was heard, coming from they could not tell where.

"Let up!" it cried. "Let up! I'm all mashed flat! Pete, you darn old fool, what's the matter with you? Let me out of this!"

The three fellows paused in their work and looked at one another in a very surprised kind of way. They were probably unaware of the existence of Pete Parrot's Polly.

"*Whew!*" the bird sharply whistled, at that moment, as it pulled itself out of one of Pete's pockets. "That was a 'tight squeeze! Hello! what do you think you are trying to do here? Sock et to 'em Pete! Give 'em a taste of Tophet!"

The parrot was a talker, but it is safe to say it only repeated sayings it had heard from its master under the circumstances, and yet one would almost be willing to take oath that it could reason.

The three masked fellows laughed, and finished their task.

"I think I'll take this bird with me," said one, then, reaching out his hand to lay hold upon the parrot.

"No, I be darn if you do!" Polly cried, and with a leap she spread her wings and sought refuge in one of the trees. "Polly wants whisk. Polly wants booze. Set 'em up again, Pete, set 'em up again. Where are you, Pete? Poor Pete, laid out this time, stiff."

The outlaws laughed so heartily they could hardly attend to the business they had in hand, but they soon checked themselves.

"This won't do," said one. "We must get out of here now, or we'll never get away at all. Here, lend a hand, and we'll dispose of these fellows."

"Confound your pictur's!" cried Pete Parrot, just recovering from his state of semidaze. "Let me loose, or I'll blow every bone out of yer flabby skin till ye will think—"

"Shut up!" with a brutal kick. "Open

that cabeza again, and I'll kick it clean off your shoulders."

"What's goin' ter be done with us?" asked the old scout.

"Wait and find out, cuss ye."

They had now taken Pete up and carried him into the house, where a hole in the center of the floor revealed where the masked men had been in hiding.

Carrying their victim to this hole, they doubled him and poked him through and let him drop, not caring whether the fall hurt him or not, and Pete struck the clay bottom with a thud.

Him disposed of, they returned for the old scout, and when they dropped him down in similar fashion he struck upon Pete, almost knocking the breath out of him.

"Throw in ther cabin, now, an' make a job of et," Pete growled, as soon as he could say anything.

There was a swinging ladder at one side of the opening, and down this one of the masked fellows now hastened, and Pete thought his end had come.

He expected nothing else than to feel the keen stroke of a knife in some vital part of his anatomy, but he was mistaken. The fellow moved over to one corner or side of the hole, and there picked up a burden.

Like a flash it popped into Pete's head what this burden was.

It was the missing girl!

Supporting her partly over his shoulder and partly held against his breast, he climbed the ladder with apparently little effort, till hands reached down from above and relieved him of his load, when he quickly scrambled on up and out, and the trap was closed down with a bang.

Pete and his companion heard them moving about in the cabin for a few minutes, after which they passed out and all was silence.

"Pard, did ye ever see anything done so cussed neat in all yer life?" Pete Parrot then growled. "Them fellers and ther gal was in hyer all ther time. What a lot of fools we all was!"

"Not all of 'em was hyer, that's sure," the scout responded.

"How is that?"

"Thar was a table in ther middle of ther cabin, with a rug under et, an' nobody knowed about this hole."

"Ha! that's et, sure enough. But, whar was t'other feller? No matter, he was whar he was, and he took us in ther neatest ever seen. But, they won't git off all clear, I'm bettin'."

"I don't see why they won't."

"Fer ther reason that Poll Parrot, ther P'inter, is out thar, an' ef she will only keep her cussed head tight shet and 'tend strickly to bizness, she may be of some use to that 'ar gal in her distress. Too bad somebody didn't know about this hole, an' search et."

"You are right. But, somebody did know about et, et seems; an' right thar is more puzzle. Ef et was knowed to ther outlaws, how is et et was so mighty secret that not another soul knowed a thing about et? But, no use wastin' breath, fer we will all want all our wind ter holler with, soon's we hear any of 'em back this way again."

## CHAPTER VII.

### BESSIE'S FATE. DARK DISCOVERY.

ONE part of Sidney Reynold's ground was lower than all the rest.

A sort of gully commenced at a point a hundred yards or so to the northwest of the cabin, and descended to the stream that flowed through the valley bottom.

When they left the cabin with their fair prisoner, bound and gagged so that she could not make a sound, the three ruffians bore her away in the direction of 'his gully, and down into it.

The first part of the way they had to exercise great precaution, but once in the

gully they ran forward with haste toward the stream.

Reaching its banks, they unhesitatingly entered the water and waded to the north.

A hundred yards or so of this, and they came to their horses.

The animals were tethered under some willow bushes, where grass was plenty, and had evidently been content. Anyhow, they had not been discovered.

The horses were quickly freed and the outlaws mounted them, one carrying the helpless girl before him on the saddle, and entering the stream they proceeded a long distance further to the north before they left the water.

Here they turned to the west, making straight for the hills in that direction, and were presently lost to sight from the valley.

There was no regular trail here, and their destination, when finally it was reached, proved to be a rough, newly made cabin far up among the rocks, in a place not likely to be discovered.

As they drew up before the cabin, an old woman with a face anything but angelic in expression, opened the door.

"I thought ye wasn't never a-comin'," she croaked.

"And all the rest of us thought the same," answered the man who held the girl. "Here is your charge, at last."

"Not dead, ar' she?"

"No, not a bit of et; she'll come around all right. You take care of her, and we'll get right along and put as much country behind us as possible."

The old woman stepped forward and took the girl out of his arms, and the trio of horsemen moved off immediately. And as they went they removed their masks and made other changes in their appearance.

Finally they struck a trail, and were soon dashing along in the direction of Bullion Bar.

This place, Bullion Bar, was a camp of about the same size and importance as Silver City, and lay some twenty miles southwest from the latter place.

The news of the latest doings of Captain Blue-beard and his band had not yet reached the camp when these three horsemen came dashing in, all covered with dust, and showing evidence of a long, hard ride.

They drew up in front of the Maverick Saloon.

"Hillo! whar from, pards?" a man in front of the saloon greeted them.

"From Alkali Springs," was the ready answer. "Captain Blue-beard has been on a reg'lar rampage."

"At ther Springs?"

"No; at Silver City."

"What's he been up to now?"

"Seems he's been tryin' ter wipe out Deadwood Dick."

"What! What's that yer say?"

A little knot of men were already on the spot, others were coming, and great excitement was shown.

"That was it," the newscarrrier repeated. "He has been trying to wipe out Deadwood Dick, but got the worst of it. Then there has been a mysterious murder, and the deuce has been to pay in general. The whole camp is up in arms, and there is a big time."

"Who told ye 'bout et, Tony?"

This fellow's name was Tony Wood. The place he had mentioned, Alkali Springs, was some forty miles away.

"Why, we ran up against a party of searchers, and they held us up till they made sure we had clean bills of health from ther last place. But, come, hustle out and join in ther jubilee."

Others took up the cry immediately, and in less than ten minutes mounted men were beginning to congregate before the Maverick, eager to go to the aid of their neighbors and more eager to hunt down Captain Blue-beard and his band of cut-throats.

Meantime, the new-comers had given all the particulars they could.

Even they were as eager as the others, spite of the fact that they had come forty miles, and eagerly bargained for fresh horses, Tony and another getting them, but not the third of the rascals.

In half an hour a party of thirty men or more, led by one of the first men of Bullion Bar, was dashing away in the direction of Silver City.

Meanwhile, how fared it with Bessie Reynold.

When the old hag, who seemed to be a Mexican, had half-carried and half-dragged her into the cabin, she closed the door.

That done, she removed the gag from the fair girl's mouth, and set about restoring her to consciousness, knowing well how to go about it, hideous creature though she was.

It was evident enough that the girl had received no gentle usage.

The gag in her mouth had been tied tight, and her limbs were cramped from being so long bound in the same position.

It was some little time before she came to, and when she did, it was with a look of horror in her eyes. Her first recollection was of the men who had captured her, and she looked for them.

When she could speak, she asked:

"Where am I?"

"In a safe place, dearie," the old hag tried to answer pleasantly.

"And who are you?"

"Who am I, dearie? Why, I am Mother Mexico, and I am going to take care of you till your lover comes for you, you see."

"My lover?"

"To be sure; Mr. Wiltner, I mean."

A look of great relief came into the girl's face immediately.

"And where is he?" she asked.

"He is with the others, dearie, after the outlaws. Oh! but they will hang them high when they get them."

"But, where are we? I do not remember this cabin. You are not deceiving me, are you, Mother Mexico?"

"No, no, that I swear I am not, lady."

"Then the cabin?"

"It is in a secret place in the hills. You see I tell you truly. No one can find you here to harm you, and as soon as he can, your lover will come to you here. Now cheer up and wait."

"Yes, but who brought me here?"

"Your lover, of course."

"Do you mean to tell me he bound and gagged me, and almost killed—"

"No, no, no! He rescued you, took you away from three masked fellows, whose lives paid the penalty for what they did, and as they were overtaken near here he gave you into my keeping."

"Now I can believe you, Mother Mexico. You are a stranger to me, but I am sure I can trust you. Will you free my hands?"

"Mercies! have I left you bound, dearie? There—now you are free. But you are not to go out."

"And why?"

"Mr. Wiltner forbids it. He is afraid you might be seen."

"All right; I will obey. But open the door and let me look out, Mother Mexico, just once."

"I can't refuse you that, dearie."

The old woman got up and opened the door, giving her prisoner a view of the rugged rocks around them, and she was about to close the door again when a strange visitor hopped into the room.

The old hag gave a cry of alarm at sight of it and crossed herself with superstitious vigor the next moment.

The visitor was a parrot, and as it looked around the room it cried out:

"Hello, Pete! Where are you, Pete?"

"Saints protect us!" cried the old hag.

"Where is Pete? Hello, Pete!"

"It must be the Evil One—"

"No, no, Mother Mexico; it is only a parrot; can't you see? Here, Polly, pretty Polly; Polly want a cracker?"

"Polly wants whisk'; Polly wants booze. Where is Pete? Pete in a fix, Dick gone to devil, Polly all alone. Hello, Pete! you darn old galoot, you! Where the deuce are you?"

The old hag was staring at the bird in half-alarm, but Bessie smiled, though sadly, and called the parrot to her.

She had not been deceived by the lying tongue of the old woman, and she gave close attention to every word the parrot uttered. If Pete Parrot was in a fix, and Dick gone, her friends were few."

A thought had come to her; she must use this bird to convey a message to her lover, or to Deadwood Dick, if he was alive.

She believed herself to be in the hands of Captain Blue-beard.

A little petting and patting made the parrot her friend, and she begged the old hag to let her keep it.

There was no objection to this, and she made much of the rather spoiled pet, but the parrot would break away from her once in awhile and go tearing around the room calling for Pete.

For a couple of hours there was no chance for the girl to write a message, but finally the opportunity came and she quickly took advantage of it.

The old woman went out for a few minutes, locking the door after her, and as soon as she was gone Bessie took paper and pencil from her pocket and hastily dashed off a few words.

As soon as done, she folded the note closely, and with a bit of threat tied it around the parrot's wing.

She had barely done when the old woman came in.

"Mother Mexico," she said, "I think I will let this bird go. It is all the time calling for Pete, and seems anxious to get away."

"All right, dearie, just as you please."

Bessie stepped toward the door, while speaking, and now said to the parrot:

"Polly go find Pete. Pete wants Polly. Dick wants Polly. Polly go find them. Pretty Polly, go find Pete!"

With that she gave the bird a toss high in the air, and stepping back, the old woman closed the door again at once.

"Just as well to be rid of the thing, dearie," the old hag remarked. "Such a bird as that belongs to the devil, and no good can come of it. Can't you eat something now, dearie?"

Meanwhile the searchers had been pushing their work, both for the missing girl and the outlaws.

Fred Wiltner and his men had gone over the ground carefully as far as the place where Sidney Reynold had been murdered, but not a trace was to be found.

Nor could anything be discovered of the body.

They were baffled.

"We have got to give it up," Wiltner declared. "It beats anything I ever experienced in my life. If it were possible, I would think Paul Young had had a hand in this."

"But, that's impossible," one of his men spoke up.

"Yes, I know it is, unless he had helpers. By heavens! we'll go search his ranch, anyhow."

This proposition was agreed to, and off they went with thud and clatter, in the direction of Paul Young's home.

Paul Young was not a wealthy man by any means, but he was getting a fair start in the world, and any one would have said he was destined to become one.

He lived alone on his ranch, save for an old Mexican woman who acted as his house-

keeper. This old woman, when the cavalcade of searchers rode up, appeared before them in a terrified manner.

"Well, what's the matter, old dame?" demanded Wiltner, roughly.

"Master Paul!" the old woman cried. "Is Master Paul with you? I have found a terrible thing, senors!"

"Ha! a terrible thing? What is it?"

"The body of our neighbor, Senor Reynold; I have just found it in the shed by the stables."

"Ho ho!" and arching his brows Wiltner looked around at his followers. "Now what is to be made of all this, my men? Why is that body here?" And how came it here? These are things for us to know."

"You ar' right, Fred."

"And I think Paul Young will have something to answer for yet."

"But, good senor," piped the old woman, "Master Paul has been away since an early hour, and he knows nothing about it."

"Then how came the body here?"

"Alas! I know not."

"Maybe you brought it from where the deed was done."

"My God!" in Spanish. "Do you think I would do such a thing? I did not know the man was dead, and the sight of it almost killed me."

"When did you discover it?"

"Not five minutes ago."

"Come, lead us to the place."

The woman started, though her limbs almost refused to carry her, and when she came to a shed that was used partly as a wagon-house and partly as a cow-shed, she covered her eyes and pointed.

There on the ground the missing body of Sidney Reynold lay.

How had it come there?

"Who can explain this mystery?" demanded Wiltner. "Men, what do you make of it? Maybe I am prejudiced, hating Paul Young as I do."

"Et looks dark fer him," one man of the party declared. "Maybe he had some one else to kill the poor old man, and it was part of ther plan to take ther body hyer to put it out of ther way. I hate to say et, but don't et look so?"

"Come!" cried Wiltner. "Paul Young shall answer." And away they dashed, on the backward trail.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### PETE'S FRESH TROUBLE. BAFFLED.

THEY were grim and determined men, every one of them, in looks at least, and it looked as though the murderer of Sidney Reynold would fare ill at their hands, once they caught him.

And so he certainly would, too, let the guilt fall where it might. Wiltner was a man who was known to stop at nothing when once he had set his mind upon anything, and here he had more than an ordinary interest at stake.

Up the valley they dashed, to the point where the body of Sidney Reynold had first been found, and thence across in the direction of his cabin, without a stop until they drew rein under the trees, when they looked around for the two men whom they had left there.

These were Pete Parrot and the old scout.

"Must have set out to do a little searching on their own account," remarked Wiltner.

"Yes, that's so. We'll push on to the motte, eh, Fred? From there we'll go south and strike Young's trail, you know."

"Yes, yes, we'll push on."

"Hark!"

So called one of the men, nearer the cabin than the rest.

"What is it?"

"Listen."

All were silent.

"Hilloo!" the cry came faintly to their ears. "Hilloo! Hilloo!"

"Who the deuce is that?" demanded Wiltner. "Where is that voice coming from, Battson?"

"Durn me ef I kin tell, Fred," was the answer. "It 'pears ter come from ther cabin, an' yet it seems ter come from ther air; I give et up, that's all."

"Well, I don't."

Wiltner was out of the saddle in a second, and into the cabin.

There he heard the cry again, now plainer than he had heard it before, and he answered:

"Hello!"

"Say, get us out o' hyer, fur ther luv ov goodness!"

"Who are you?"

"Pete Parrot and his pard—not reg'lar pard, but ther old scout, ye know. We ar' in a hole."

"Yes, I should say you were. They are under the floor, boys. Never knew there was a place under the cabin before. Here, we'll get them out."

The rug and table had been put in place, but it was only a natural thought to move them to look for a door, since no door appeared anywhere else, and it was only the work of a moment to open the trap.

Exclamations of surprise ran round through the crowd.

"Of all ther consarned, measley, p'izen fixes I was ever put in," growled Pete, down below, "this hyer is about as bad as ther wu'st. Git us out, pards, and I'll onwind a tale to ye that will make ye kick yerselves all over ther hull darn ranch."

"Go down, somebody, and free them," ordered Wiltner.

He was obeyed.

With a little help Pete and Gil Bliss got up out of the hole, and the old man swore like a trooper as he pulled himself together.

All were eager for their story, and Pete told it as briefly as he could, giving force to his expressions as he went along, and he was listened to with close attention.

"Then she was here all the time!" cried Wiltner.

"Right down thar in the 'ar hole," insisted Pete, emphatically.

"And here we have been wasting good time doing nothing. You say there were three of these men?"

"Yes, cuss 'em, three; and I'd like ter have 'em up in a row before me this minute. They clipped us over with never a show fer our side at all."

More questions and answers, and Wiltner said:

"Boys, it seems impossible that they could have got away from here without leaving some trace of the direction they went. We must pick up their trail and corral them."

"Ther hardest thing in ther world ter do, with the ground the way it is," the old scout averred.

This was so; the dry season had set in.

"We can't if we don't try, that's a sure thing," cried Wiltner. "Scatter, and look sharp. No use looking the way we came, of course, for a whole army couldn't have kicked up the dust more."

They looked, but in vain.

Wiltner, himself, went toward the gully, but appeared to discover nothing.

At the end of half an hour's search he called his men together, saying it was evidently no use looking further.

"We'll go on after the other party," he said, "and see what luck they have been having. I think Paul Young can tell us more than any one else about this whole mystery. Forward."

Off they dashed again, out of the valley toward the sandy plain and in the direction of the cottonwood motte.

Pete Parrot and the old scout looked after them for a moment in silence.

"What yer think, pard?" Pete demanded.

"I'm thinkin' I wish we could 'a' got out 'fore they kem along ter spile up ther ground the way they have done."

"You think you could 'a' picked up that trail?"

"I would make a try at et."

"Do ye know what I think, pard? Ef ye don't I'll tell ye anyhow."

"What do you think?"

"I think that man Wiltner is a wolf in sheepskin, that's what I think. Ther more I see of him ther less I like his ring."

"And I'll tell ye what I think of him, Pard Peter. I think he didn't make no kind of a search himself when he went out thar toward ther gully. Thar is a crooked bone in that feller's leg, som'ers."

"You ar' right!"

Pete grasped the old scout's hand and shook it, while he added:

"We'll go out thar and nose around ourselves a bit. We can't hope ter find anything where they have been cavoortin' around so, but we may git onto somethin' outside of their circle."

"My own idee exact. Come along with ye."

"But, we must leave somethin' fer Dicky, so's he'll know whar we be."

"All right, you 'tend to that. Then we'll see ef we can't strike ther trail of them fellers."

Pete stepped to the door of the cabin, and with his knife scratched four letters, driving a peg and hanging a bit of bright cloth on it to draw attention. The letters were these:

D. NW P.

"Thar, he will understand that," Pete confidently declared, stepping back and surveying his artistic handiwork, "but et ain't safe ter say that anybody else will."

That done, he followed after the old scout, who was already some steps away in the direction of the gully.

"I was thinkin'," he said, when Pete overtook him, "which way et would be nat'ral fer them cusses ter take off, when they left ther cabin, an' et strikes me this hyer is ther way. They would' quickest get out o' sight, ye see."

"That's hoss sense, pard."

"And it's hyer we'll most mebbly find trace of 'em."

The old scout went forward, his nose near the ground and his keen eyes on the alert for signs.

So they continued until they were well down into the gully, when he suddenly called to Pete, rising up and pointing to something he had discovered.

"Jest look close right thar, Pard Peter," he directed.

"What aire et?" Pete Parrot asked.

"Look an' see."

Pete stooped to get a closer view, when of a sudden his companion threw himself upon him, bearing him down into the dirt, and then immediately began a struggle for the mastery.

"Cusses on ye!" gasped Pete. "What d'ye mean by et?"

"I'll show ye, in one minute, confound you! I have been wastin' time enough hyer!"

Pete fought like a tiger, but he had been taken at a disadvantage and there was little chance for him. The old scout was the stronger, too.

Presently a blow on the head dazed Pete for a moment, and while he was in that condition the other bound him.

"Thar ye be, cuss ye!" he cried.

He rose and mopped the perspiration from his face.

"You ar' a rank traitor, that's what you ar'!" grated Pete, glaring.

"Ha! ha! Not a bit of et. I showed my colors, when I first 'peared, but I got in a

fix and had to deceive you an' your pard to git out of et again. See? I wish you good-by, Peter; I'll do ther rest of the work alone."

"Hold on, consarn ye! I want ter know more 'bout ye. Ar' you Captain Blue-beard, in a disguise?"

"Ha! ha! ha!" came back the mocking laugh, as the man walked away.

"I'm nothin' but a he-howlin', puddin'-headed ijjit!" complained Pete to himself. "Ef ther fool-killer comes along this way he'll make short work of me, sure enough. Ef I get my brains belted out a couple or few times more, I'll be a know-nothin' fer sure."

There Pete lay, his hands and feet tied, and his late companion in trouble had passed out of sight.

A few seconds later Pete heard a welcome and familiar voice.

"Hello, Pete!" it called.

It was Poll Parrot, his feathered pet.

"Hello!" Pete responded, "Where the deuce ar' ye, Poll?"

"I'm here; where the deuce are you? Ain't it 'most drink-time? I'm mighty dry."

Polly came half hopping and half flying to the place where Pete lay, and getting up on his breast she surveyed him critically for a moment, then said:

"Pete, you're in a fix."

"Yes, you're right, bird," Pete growled.

"Hillo! what's that under your wing thar?"

"Polly wants whisk'. Polly wants booze, Pete. Where's Dick? Dick in a hole up to his neck. Poor Dick! Pete, you're a fool."

"Thar, by thunder, you hev hit et right at last, Poll! That's the first sensible thing you have said yet. Confound you, I wish you could talk like a human, and answer questions. Where have you been, anyhow? Who put that bit of paper under your flopper?"

"Oh, shut up!"

"Jest what I've told you to do a thousand times. All you know is what you hev heard said, an' when you git in a say-in' pat et ain't your fault. Condemn my measly luck!"

Pete tugged at his bonds, eager to get his hands freed to learn what the parrot had under its wing, but his efforts were in vain.

"Never mind," he consoled himself, "et's 'most time fer Dicky to be back, an' he'll find me when he comes. I'll let out a yell, too, now and again, so's ter keep up a rumpus in ther welkin."

Pete's patience held out fairly well for an hour, but at the end of that time he hadn't a spark left.

And after that, as hour after hour passed, he simply fumed and bellowed.

Night came on, and still he was there.

Polly, however, had long since deserted him, or possibly had understood at last his command to go and fetch Dick.

In the mean time active work had been going on in other quarters.

When Paul Young set out on the trail of Captain Blue-beard, he meant to run him to earth if it was possible to do it.

It was an easy matter to pick up the first trail, but in the sand south of the motte there were tracks in every direction, and it was not easy to keep it, and the progress was slow.

The trail led to the south, in the direction of the basalt hills and the desert.

There were more than one, properly, but they managed to hold to the one they had set out upon until they came to the basalt pan.

Here they became puzzled, then confused, and at last no longer had a trail to follow, when Young jerked his horse to stop with an oath. It was not the first time the men of Silver City had been baffled thus.

"The same old story," growled Young. "The trail simply can't be followed any further."

"And that means that ther 'fernal thief must git off," stormed another. "It is too cussed bad, that's all."

"Et didn't do a whole lot of good, sending for Deadwood Dick."

"The boy has had no fair chance at them."

"Well, he'll have the chance now ter prove what he is worth, if he can tear himself away from Silver City Sal long enough."

"What do you mean?"

"He's gone on her."

"If he is he probably knows what he is doing."

"There's only one of two things to be done, now," interrupted Young. "I will put it to vote."

"What's them?"

"Either to go ahead and scour for the outlaws, or return empty and report and get more men and bring along Deadwood Dick. Which shall it be?"

Some were for continuing on into the hills, trail or no trail, but the greater number by far were for going back.

So, back they started.

They proceeded at a moderate pace, for the sun was hot on the sand, and when they came at last in sight of the cottonwood motte once more, they beheld a large band of horsemen coming toward them.

"Something has been discovered, depend on it," remarked Paul Young. "These are probably Fred Wiltner and his party. No doubt Deadwood Dick is with them, and they may have been about to join us down in the hills. But, we'll soon learn. Forward, men, for they may want our help."

## CHAPTER IX.

### FRESH NEWS. ANOTHER TRAIL.

THE two parties saw each other about the same time.

Wiltner called his men to a halt, saying it was no use to use up their horses for nothing.

They waited where they were for a few minutes, and then cantered lazily back to the cottonwood motte, where they waited for the others to come up.

It was by this time after the noon hour, and still the dead man had not been buried. Interest in the living had been too great for any attention to be given to the dead—especially dead outlaws.

Paul Young and his men came straight on at a steady swing, and ere long they were at hand and drew rein.

"Well, what is the word?" greeted Wiltner.

"The same old story," the answer. "The trail petered out on the hardpan."

"And you didn't push into the hills to try and pick it up again? Or on to the desert, to see whether it crossed?"

"That has been tried."

"Yes, on a cold trail, but this one was fresh. You giving up so easily has a suspicious look."

"Have a care, Fred Wiltner. Our peace has been patched up only for the present. I came back for the purpose of finding Deadwood Dick and his pard. This is work for them to do."

"Why so?"

"Are they with you?"

"Answer my question first, sir."

"Answer mine."

"Well, no."

"Where are they?"

"Dick has gone to Silver City. Now will you answer my query?"

"Yes. It is work for them, because Silver City sent for Deadwood Dick to come and take a hand in hunting down Captain Blue-beard."

"And Deadwood Dick has been attending to other things since he came here, as you know. He is now enjoying the society of Silver City Sal. They rode to the camp together."

"He may have a purpose in it. What took him to the camp?"

"To get his horses. But, Paul Young, we have made a discovery and want an explanation out of you."

"What now?"

Each leader had his hand on a gun as they faced each other.

"We have discovered the body of Sidney Reynold, and in a place which casts suspicion upon you. As I said, we want an explanation."

"Where was it found? What explanation can I give you?"

"It was found at your ranch, in your wagon-shed. Just tell us how it came there, if you please."

"That is something I cannot do, Fred Wiltner. It looks, though, as if some one was bound to put the crime upon me if possible. If the body had first been found there it would have looked bad for me."

"And it looks bad for you now. You may have had an accomplice who took the body there to dispose of it."

"Ha! curse you! you dare to fling it in my teeth again that I killed Sidney Reynold! Draw back there and defend yourself, for I will stand this no longer! You or I must bite the dust!"

Young's eyes flashed, and there was a ring in his voice that showed his determination.

For the moment Wiltner's face paled, but he nerved himself.

"If you must have it," he answered, backing his horse, "this is as good a place as any."

"Hold on!" cried a man in the crowd. "This won't do, boys!"

"No! no!" others took it up, excitedly.

"Keep off," warned Young. "It is his life or mine."

"Et means both yer lives, you fools!" cried an old man of the party. "This thing has got ter rest till our work is done!"

"If both, so be it," insisted Young, firmly. "He has no right to accuse me of a crime of which I am innocent—for which I have been tried and proved innocent!"

"Proved? Pah! That was no proof."

"It was a trial, and my life was at stake, Fred Wiltner."

"That's so, that's so," cried the crowd. "Part 'em, boys, part 'em! This hyer won't do!"

There was a sudden rush from both sides, and the antagonists were parted by half a hundred horsemen, each being forced to draw back and put up his weapons.

"Well, for this time," Paul Young submitted, "but it has got to come sooner or later. Did you not find the girl?"

"No; but we know where she was when we wur at the cabin." And the particulars were given, as they were known to the man who told the story, much to the surprise of Young.

"I never knew there was a hole under the cabin," he declared. "But, what are you going to do now?"

"That's fer Fred to say. Do ye think ye kin keep from fightin', ef ye are 'lowed ter come together? This hyer business is too serious ter have any shootin' in our own ranks."

"Yes, yes, if Wiltner will hold his tongue; Miss Reynold must be found."

The other was consulted, and a semblance of peace was patched up again for the time being.

"The plan is," said Wiltner, "to get back to Silver City, and there get grub and feed our horses, and after that, send out parties regularly provisioned for a campaign."

"And Deadwood Dick with them."

"Exactly."

"I am in for that. Something has got to be done, and that is the way to get down to work. But, what about these bodies?"

"Some of the men can take them up and bring them in."

A few words more, about the details, and

all together they set forward for Silver City.

The camp was not a great distance from the cottonwoods, and the cavalcade of horsemen were soon dashing into its main street, where the citizens who had remained at home were found in great excitement.

"What's the trouble?" eagerly demanded Wiltner.

"Captain Blue-beard has been hyer!" was the excited cry.

"Been here?"

"Yes!"

"When?"

"Not more'n a hour ago."

"Was he alone?"

"No, one man with him, and they had a prisoner."

"Was it a woman?"

"Yes."

"Bessie!" cried Paul Young. "Why didn't you shoot the horses from under them and capture them?"

"Bless ye," cried the proprietor of the Red Eye, the leading saloon of the camp, "they was gone almost 'fore they got hyer, an' we hadn't no show; an' then, too, thar was danger of hittin' ther gal."

"We must after them!" cried Young. "Feed and eat as soon as you can, men, and we'll be off. It don't seem possible that they can get away from us now. But, where is Deadwood Dick?"

"Deadwood Dick?" asked the spokesman of the home guard, so to call him. "He ain't been hyer."

"Nor Silver City Sal?"

"Not a sign of her!"

"This is strange," muttered Wiltner. "Didn't they come into camp an hour ago, or more? Dick came for horses for himself and pard."

"They ain't been hyer, that's sure enough."

"Are their horses here?"

"You kin look."

The proprietor of the Red Eye waved his hand in the direction of the stables, and Wiltner and others rode quickly around, and as soon as they saw the empty stalls the leader laughed heartily.

"What is et, boss?" asked one of those with him.

"Can't you see?"

"No."

"Ha! ha! Scratch your head and think, then. Ha! ha! ha!"

They rode back to the front of the Red Eye, Wiltner still laughing, and there he demanded:

"Say, Hone Biggle, was that a joke?"

That was the name of the saloon proprietor, curious as it was.

"Was what a joke, Mr. Wiltner?"

"Ha! ha! ha! I see it wasn't. Why, we have all been so excited we didn't see it before. You know when Young here brought the word to camp?"

"Of course."

"I wasn't here, you know, but I see now that the boys took everything in the shape of horse flesh the town could boast. Somebody here is mounted on Deadwood Dick's horse this minute."

Hone Biggle and the man who happened to be on Deadwood Dick's horse looked sheepish, but the others laughed.

The laugh was quickly cut short, however; serious business was in hand.

Horses were quickly fed, the men caught what they could in the way of food, and in as short a time as possible a picked party set forth on the new trail, full of determination.

It was a puzzling matter, and it was taking many a curious turn.

No one could grasp it.

Paul Young was the leader of the band of horsemen. A nickel had been tossed to see whether it should be he or Wiltner, and it had fallen to Young to be the captain.

So it was that Wiltner, with those who

had been using "borrowed horses," remained in the camp.

All wondered what had become of Deadwood Dick and Silver City Sal.

A considerable time passed, and it was being proposed that searchers should set out to look for them, when the camp was surprised to see another cavalcade come dashing up its main street.

These were the men from Bullion Bar. "Where's Fred Wiltner?" demanded Henry White, as he and his men came to a stop before the Red Eye.

"Right here," Wiltner answered for himself, coming out of the saloon. "What are you doing here; White?"

"We have come to take a hand in this game. Are we too late?"

"Very likely you are. Our men are hot on the newest trail, now, and we look for them in by night, with the prisoner."

"How is it you are idle here?"

"The choice fell to Paul Young; trail not big enough for both of us, you see. But, how did you get word of this?"

"Tony Wood, here, and his pards, brought the news."

Other questions and answers.

"But, the dead men?" White questioned. "Have you buried them? I want to have a look at them."

"No, they are on exhibition yet, just back here in a vacant shed. But, say, White, you haven't seen anything of Silver City Sal?"

"No, sir. She gone, too?"

"As mysteriously as Bessie Reynold, and Deadwood Dick with her."

"The deuce you say! No, I have not seen her. You seem to have a bagful of mystery over here."

"Yes, you are right; but, then, some of it is not going to be so mysterious, when it comes to be investigated closely; for instance, the murder of Reynold."

"Then you think—"

"That Paul Young is the man who killed him—yes. But here are the dead; see if you recognize any of them—Ha! you do? Who are they? Here may be a clue to Captain Blue-beard's identity, even if we don't get him this deal. Name them."

#### CHAPTER X.

##### SILVER CITY SAL'S PERFDY.

HENRY WHITE recognized two of the outlaws as men who had been seen at Bullion Bar, men who had always had more or less money to spend but who had never been known to work.

As they had been orderly, however, attending to their own business and paying their bills, no one had troubled them with idle questions.

There had been other of like stripe with them at times.

"Would you know any of the others, should you see them?" inquired Wiltner, as they turned away.

"Yes, I am sure I would, at least one other," White answered.

There was nothing could be done, now, until Young and his men came back and it was known what success they had met with.

Toward night Fred Wiltner approached Henry White and said:

"I must ask a favor of you, White."

"Well, what is it?"

"I have got to run down to my claim, and I want you to take charge of things here till I get back."

"All right, I can do that. When will you be back?"

"An hour after dark, maybe."

"Very well."

So, mounting his horse, Wiltner rode off in the direction of his claim, and the remainder of the afternoon passed without exciting incident, and night came on.

And now what of Deadwood Dick and his enigmatical fellow-prisoner?

Dick had not been idle, by any means, so far as thought had gone, nor in other respects either.

The more he thought, however, concerning Silver City Sal, the less he understood about her. She was a mystery to him, and he had become more than ever suspicious of her.

By constant and silent working, he had managed to free his hands and feet, but he did not let this be known, not even to the woman.

She had talked with him more or less, and had made a proposition.

If Captain Blue-beard came for her, or should send for her, she would go, and once free, might stand a better chance for liberating Dick; to which Dick gladly agreed.

It would, or possibly it might, give him the chance to decide whether she was true or false.

Two or three of the outlaws were in the cavern constantly, which was not favorable to Dick's plans, but as he could not alter the situation, he had to make the best of it.

Finally, about dark, one of these came to the spot where the prisoners lay, and speaking to Silver City Sal, said:

"Ther captain wants you, miss."

"Wants me?"

"Yes."

"What does he want?"

"I don't know, but you'll be a fool not ter go, that's all. Et will mean yer life, ef you ar' civil to him."

"Well, I'll go, if you will release my feet so I can walk."

"I'll sartain do that 'ar, miss."

The fellow quickly cut the cords that bound her ankles, and helped her to get upon her feet.

"Where will you take me?" she asked.

"To the captain's private office," with a laugh. "That curtained-off place over there by the wall."

"Very well, I will go. Good-by, for the present, Dick; I will plead your cause as well as my own. If they take your life they shall take mine, or I will take it myself."

"Good-by," Dick responded. "Don't risk yourself to save me, if you have any chance offered you."

"You, have heard what I will do, Deadwood Dick."

Dick said nothing further to that, and the young woman was led away in the darkness of the cavern.

There was a small fire far back in one angle, but that did not begin to light up the whole space, and it barely served to throw a shadow out upon the rock wall opposite the opening.

As soon as Silver City Sal was gone, Dick stretched himself.

"Now for it," he said. "I would not take the chances of letting her know I was free, for I have strong misgivings concerning her. Better to wait hours as I have done, than to be betrayed a second time—for I feel that she played me false in the motte."

While he was thus musing he heard another step near him, and dropped back and pretended to be still bound.

"How are you?" was the rough demand.

"Getting tired of this," Dick answered, sullenly.

"Well, I reckon thar will be a change fer ye purty soon."

"The sooner the better."

"Let us see how you are bound."

The fellow leaned over to feel of the prisoner's bonds, but he felt something else instead.

Dick had picked up a chunk of rock that happened to be near him, and as the man's head came down toward him he gave him a tap with the stone that rolled him over without a sound.

"One less, anyhow," Dick said to himself, joyfully.

He was on his feet in a moment, and went

about taking possession of the man's hat, coat and weapons with no loss of time.

That done, he bound and gagged the fellow and left him.

"Now for it," he grimly muttered, setting his jaws in his firm way when he had a fight for life on hand. "Escape is mine, but I must first learn what I can of my fair Sally."

It was his intention, if he had proof that Silver City Sal had been honest in her intention toward him, to aid her to escape at the same time, and if he could overhear some of her conversation with Captain Blue-beard he would probably get all the proof he could ask for.

This, then, was his first business—to learn what he could.

Crossing to the south wall of the cavern, he crept silently along by it until he came to the part that had been curtained off for the captain's privacy.

There was a light in the inclosed part and voices were here, and creeping up close, Dick slipped his fingers behind the blanket curtain where it was drawn close to the wall and peered in.

There sat Silver City Sal, with her face toward him, while facing her, with his back not a yard distant from where Dick stood, was Captain Blue-beard, in all his disguise of hair and whiskers. But it was the expression of the woman's face that Dick noted with interest.

She was smiling, her eyes were flashing brilliantly, and there was certainly nothing to fear in her manner.

"Just as I thought," muttered Dick, grimly. "She took me in."

The woman was speaking.

"Yes, I have served you, and now it is your turn to serve me," she was saying. "Will you do that?"

"It depends on how you want to be served, my beautiful Sally," was the reply. "Just show down your hand, and I'll tell you whether I can follow your lead or not."

"Well, you must give up that Reynold girl and marry me."

Dick gave a start on hearing this.

"Impossible, my dear Sally, impossible. It simply can't be done, you see. I should be delighted to oblige you, but unfortunately I happen to love the other, and she has a mine at her back."

The woman's face flushed, and her eyes snapped fire.

"This to me!" she cried.

"I speak plainly."

"Yes, too plainly, by half. You insult my love for you—"

"Sh! You were about to speak my name, Silver City Sal. Do not do that, if you value your life."

"What would you do?"

"You would force me to silence you."

"Well, you may trust me, after trusting me so far. Did I not give Deadwood Dick into your hands?"

"You did, and nicely."

Dick's jaws shut hard, at this.

"What but love would have led me to do that?"

"Nothing, my dear."

"You are mocking me! You think you have played me a fool, don't you?"

"You are anything but that, my pretty Sally. Come, you and I should not quarrel, at this late day. You have helped me nobly, so far."

"And I have helped myself, too."

"What do you mean?"

"You will learn that, after awhile."

"You have served me well, I repeat, and now if you will only hold off till I win on this deal you will not lose anything by it. I can afford to make you a handsome present, once I get hold of that mine."

"Which you never will, unless you marry me."

"And if I were to do that, how could I

marry the other? And there is no other road to the mine."

"Are you blind? Could I not pass for Reynold's gal. We could impose upon the court, which is held so far away from here. Won't you do it—"

"No names, I tell you."

"Well?"

"I can't do it. I love Bessie, and must wed her."

"Well, you never will. You certainly cannot marry her till you find her, and you will not find her in a hurry."

"Ha! then it was you that spirited her away?"

The young woman smiled.

"If this is so, Sal, you have played a cute game, but you have overreached yourself in doing it. If I have lost her, I still have you."

"What do you mean?"

"That you are my prisoner here."

"Am I? This does not look much like it."

She whipped out a revolver and covered him with it.

He half sprung up, but she warned him and he hesitated, while she said:

"You shall wed me, or no one. I can be as determined as you. What do you say, now? Give me your answer."

With a snarl he sprung at her. She fired, but the bullet missed and came within an ace of striking Deadwood Dick, who dropped to his hands and knees instantly. The next instant was a blow, and the sound of running steps.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A CLOSE CALL. THE ESCAPE.

DICK had his weapon in hand, and was on his knee and one foot ready for action if forced upon him.

The steps were those of a man, who ran back into the cavern in the direction from which Dick had come. Other steps were heard, coming from the direction of the fire.

"What is it, captain?" was demanded.

"Hot is to pay," was the snarled answer.

"Where's that prisoner?"

"Right ahead of you, there. Are you going to do for him? Ha! you have found him!"

The captain had run against the man Dick had left bound, and it was all he could do to save himself a fall, but he finally did.

Dick, hearing these words, had, silently, run a little distance back along the wall, to learn what was going on, and just as he came where he could see, with the firelight in direct line, a terrible thing happened.

He caught the glitter of a knife in the firelight, then heard a thud, and the man who had dealt the deathblow rose up with an oath.

"So one foe is removed," he grated. "Deadwood Dick will give no more trouble in this world."

"We'll see about that," Dick thought to himself.

"That was quick work, captain."

"I meant it to be. I have no time to fool, now. Leave the body right there and get our horses. We must get out of here this minute. This night Captain Blue-beard disappears forever."

"And the woman?"

"I'll see to her. She's asleep, just now."

A thought came to Deadwood Dick, and he acted promptly upon it, with gun ready for instant use.

He ran ahead of Captain Blue-beard, dashed silently into the private inclosure and out of the cavern, just as Captain Blue-beard threw back the curtain in front and entered.

Dick had put out the light, and he heard the captain swearing.

"Come here, curse you!" the outlaw cried, calling to one of his men. "Bring a light!"

"Thar's matches," his follower made response, entering in haste, striking one as he came.

"What's ther rumpus now?"

"Gone!" cried the chief, as the light of the match revealed the truth to him. "But she didn't get away without help, I'll almost swear! Where's Ben and Mike?"

"Out thar."

"Bring them."

The words were loud, and another man came running.

"Hyer's me," the fellow announced, as he showed himself. "I ain't seen Mike fer ten minutes."

"Then he's the traitor I have thought [him]!" growled Blue-beard. "But, we'll overtake him; he can't be far away. He knows a hundred places to hide, though. But, the horses!"

His two followers sprung instantly to obey, and in a few seconds had the horses ready. In the mean time the captain had been searching around by the light of his candle, to find some trace of the missing young woman.

He did not find her; she was gone as completely as though the earth had made a gulp and taken her in.

"It is too cursed bad," Blue-beard growled. "She holds a secret which I must have, and she will now use it against me unless I can find and silence her. But, let's be off."

He flung himself into the saddle, his two men doing the same, and they were out and away immediately.

A little distance off, in the opposite direction, was Deadwood Dick.

He had stopped by a niche in the wall, in which he had laid the insensible form of the young woman, and by which he stood guard with weapons ready.

He drew a breath of relief as the horsemen passed out of sight, and put away his weapons.

"Better luck than I hoped for," he said to himself. "This has been a close call, sure enough. But, luck is still with me, for they left the horses by which I and this fair but false beauty came here. Sally, you and I will settle our score later, I think."

Returning to the cavern, he made his way to the spot where the horses were kept, and there were three of them.

"I wonder at this," he said to himself. "They had no use for them, but why did they not kill them— Ha! I see. On the morrow Captain Blue-beard will be the one to discover his own den. Ha! ha!"

Taking the two animals he wanted, leaving the other, Dick led them out to the place where he had left the woman.

She was there, and still unconscious.

Taking her up, Dick laid her across her own horse and secured her there, and that done, mounted his own and set forward.

He proceeded at a walk, not wanting to come in contact with the outlaw.

It was his purpose to make his way to the Reynold cabin, if he could find it, and there fall in with Pete, if he could be found, when, together, they would make the effort to recover Miss Reynold.

By that time, probably, Silver City Sal would have come to, and they might be able to force the truth out of her.

That Bessie had not yet been found, Dick was certain.

Following the direction the outlaws had taken, he presently came to the water he remembered crossing when he was brought to the cavern, and there he allowed the horse to have its own way.

It first drank, then passed down the stream, crossing diagonally, and came out on the opposite bank.

"So far so good," said Dick to himself. "I'll let you go the rest of the way out of these hills in the same fashion."

He did so, and the animals did not play him false. Their instinct was far better than his guidance could have been, coming in blindfolded as he had.

In due time they were out, when, guided by the stars, Dick set his face toward the north and pushed forward at a good live walk, and ere he had gone a great distance his companion came to.

Dick heard her groan, and stopped at once.

"Sal?" he called.

"Where am I?" the faint response.

"You are safe with me,—Deadwood Dick. We have escaped."

She gave a start, and by the time Dick had unbound her and placed her on her feet she was all right, or nearly so.

As Dick looked at her, there in the bright, New-Mexican starlight, he was not a little shocked at the appearance of her face. One side of it was all discolored and swollen.

It was the effect of the blow Captain Blue-beard had dealt her.

As Dick looked, she put up her hand.

"What has happened me?" she asked. "What is the matter with my face? Good heavens! I can see with only one eye!"

"It is where Captain Blue-beard struck you with his fist," Dick answered.

"Ha! the coward! Now I remember. But,

he shall pay for this, by the bright stars above us I swear it!"

"Pay for it he shall, Silver City Sal. I will help you in your revenge, for I owe him a grudge myself that has got to be paid off. You still regard me the same as you did?"

"Do not ask me now, Dick; let me think."

"All right. But, tell me, who is this Captain Blue-beard? Did you learn that?"

"Wait. Give me time to think it all over. Where are we going now?"

"To the Reynold cabin, if I can find it."

"Let us go on."

Dick helped her to mount, and springing into the saddle himself they were off at a canter in the fresh, cool air.

In due time they sighted the cottonwood motte, but not caring to venture too near it, Dick turned to the west and crossed diagonally in the direction of the valley where the cabin stood.

They met no one and saw no one, and for the most part their ride was made in silence.

When about half way to the cabin, from the hills which separated the fertile valley from the sandy plain, a voice suddenly broke upon their ears, and Dick drew rein with a gun in hand instantly.

But he smiled, seeing that he had been needlessly alarmed.

"Hello, Dick!" the voice called. "That you, Dick? Where the deuce you been all this time?"

It was Poll Parrot.

"Hello, Polly!" Dick greeted. "Where's Pete?"

"Oh! Pete is in a deuce of a fix. Poor Pete, he's a goner, I reckon."

The parrot had hopped out into sight, while thus chattering, and now she leaped up and alighted on Dick's shoulder.

They started on, and Dick took the parrot down and caressed it, at the same time feeling under its wings to find if Pete had used the bird to convey a message to him.

He was not surprised to find a bit of paper there, carefully folded and tied fast.

Removing it without permitting his companion to see, he put it in his pocket and replaced the bird upon his shoulder.

A little time longer and they were at the cabin.

Dick was wary, and had his weapons in hand as they drew up, but no one was there, and the cabin was still and dark.

"We'll go in and make a light," Dick proposed, "and you may rest yourself a little and see what can be done for your face. We'll find a looking-glass, I have no doubt."

Dick certainly hoped they would. He knew when Silver City Sal came to know how disfigured she was, it would be easy to work her to a desperate pitch against the man who had struck her. And that point attained, it would be easy to use her against him.

So when Dick had made the horses secure in the shadow in the rear of the cabin, they entered, and a light was soon made.

## CHAPTER XII.

### DICK'S WINNING HAND.

As soon as the light had been made, Dick looked at Sal's face.

He found that she looked even worse than he had thought. Her face was all discolored, on one side, and the eye was completely closed up.

Looking around, he soon discovered a glass, and taking it down handed it to the young woman, saying:

"You can now see what the gentleman has done for you."

She took the glass and looked.

"Heavens!" she cried. "I am a hideous object! Oh! but he shall pay for this, Deadwood Dick!"

"So I thought you would say."

"Yes, curse him! he shall pay for this! Together we will hunt him down, Dick, and the only favor I ask is that of dealing with him when we have captured him."

"We'll see about that after we have got him."

Dick had now taken the piece of paper from his pocket, and turned to the light to read it.

It was worded thus:

"TO FRED WILTNER, DEADWOOD DICK,  
OR ANY OTHER FRIEND:—

"I am a prisoner in a new cabin in the hills to the north and west of my home. Follow down through the gully, then up the river some distance, and after that due west into the hills, as nearly as I have been able to learn and guess. No time to write more.

"BESSIE REYNOLD."

Folding the paper, Dick replaced it in his pocket.

Turning then to Silver City Sal, who was still looking at her injured face, he said:

"Now, Miss Sally, you and I must have a talk."

"I am willing to talk, Dick."

"You won't deny that I have done you a good turn, will you?"

"In rescuing me from the outlaw? No, indeed. But, how did you escape and get off with me?"

"That little matters, so long as I did it. Yes, it was a good turn, in return for an evil one."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. I know all about it."

There was a look of confusion and alarm in the young woman's one available eye.

"You will have to explain fully, Dick, if you want me to understand you fully. I am not sure that I know what you are talking about."

"I see I have got to show my hand first. How much do you love me now, Sally?"

Her face flushed, on the flushable side.

"As much as ever," she answered.

"Hal hal! Yes, no doubt of it. That was a clever trick by which you placed me in the power of Captain Blue-beard."

"A trick?"

"Don't play any longer; I know all about it. I have in a measure returned good for evil. Now, I want some information out of you. I want to know the name of Captain Blue-beard, and also where Bessie Reynold is."

"Why, how do you suppose I know—"

"There, there, it won't do, Sal; I heard all that passed between you and the outlaw."

"You heard?" in alarm.

"Yes, every word."

The young woman hung her head.

"It was a scurvy trick, and it came near costing me my life," Dick went on to say. "I'm willing to overlook it, as far as possible, though, if you will now work with me against that rascal."

"I will do that, gladly. How I hate him, now!"

"He has certainly made an unsightly object of you, Sal; maybe has marked you for life."

"Curse him!"

"But, where is Bessie Reynold?"

"I was only bluffing when I told him I knew, Dick."

"No, I can't believe that: you are lying to me. But, I know where she is."

"You know?"

"She is in a new cabin in the hills northwest from here, and it won't be much trouble to find her. You see you may as well make a clean breast of it, to me."

Her face had betrayed the fact that she had spoken the truth in her talk with Captain Blue-beard.

"How did you come to know?" she demanded.

"I have a way of finding out things. But, which shall it be? Will you help me, or must I make you a prisoner?"

"A prisoner!"

"Exactly. You deserve to feel the weight of the law for your part in all this."

"I'll help you, Deadwood Dick. Let me down easy, and I'll do all I can for you. There is no reason why I shouldn't, now."

"Well, then, who is Captain Blue-beard?"

She spoke his name in whisper.

"Hal just as I thought," cried Dick. "I made a clean guess, it seems. He has played a clever role, but it has not worked according to his plans."

"Yes, he is the man, and maybe he would have killed me, had you not rescued me out of his hands, for I had a dangerous secret against him. Do you think he would?"

"I'm sure of it."

This was the last needed straw, as Dick recognized, and he knew he could now depend on the fidelity of Silver City Sal.

"When you have rested, we will push on," he said.

"I am ready now," her answer.

Dick rose and opened the door, to get the horses, and as the door swung in a bit of bright cloth on the outside caught his eye.

He paused to examine it, and found it was fixed on a wooden peg, and that under it were letters roughly scratched with a knife, which he examined eagerly to learn their meaning.

"Hal! a message from Pete!" he exclaimed.

"He has gone northwest. That indicates that he had discovered something of the whereabouts of Bessie Reynold. Maybe he has already rescued her."

"It puzzles me how either of you could know, but you certainly have it right, as I have admitted," remarked Silver City Sal.

Dick went on and made ready the horses, and by that time Sal joined him.

They mounted and were off, she having bandaged her face with a wet cloth in the mean time.

There was light enough out of the clear sky, even with no moon, for them to see where they were going, and Dick led the way down into the gully.

He had put the parrot in his pocket.

They had not gone a great distance when the familiar voice of Pete Parrot was heard.

"Hillo, thar!" Pete called. "Fur the luv ov goodness stop and set me loose out of this hyer infernal fix! Ef year' human, give heed ter my cry and set me free."

"Skin me if it isn't Pete!" exclaimed Dick. "Certainly I'll loose you, old man."

"Dicky! Thank ther Lord you hev come at last!"

"Hello, Pete!"

This was the parrot, having worked its head out of Dick's pocket.

"Hello, Polly, you green-feathered old fraud, you!" responded Pete. "You deserted me, dast ye when I was in trouble!"

"Let's take a swig, Pete."

"Never felt more like it in my life, that I'll swear."

"Polly want bocze. Set 'em up, Pete, set 'em up, set 'em up!"

"You shut up," cried Dick, cramming the bird down into his pocket, where her voice was faintly heard bidding him take a trip to a warm clime. And to Pete he added:

"Where's the old man?"

"Sure enough, whar is he, blast him!" was the growl.

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Matter! Blast him, et was him that put me in this hyer fix! He was false to ther bottom, Dicky."

"False?"

"As false as Satan! He meant business when he fired on us this mornin', an' played ther Judas when he found we had ther best of et."

"This is a surprise with a vengeance. He took us in, then, Pete, all in good style. But, where is the old fellow now?"

"I give et up. Et was hours ago when he left me hyer, an' he set off then on ther trail to find the lost gal. She had been in a hole under the cabin all ther time."

"The deuce!"

Explanations were made all around.

"Well, the thing is coming to a focus now, anyhow," remarked Dick. "If we can only overhaul the old fellow before he gets off with the girl, all will yet be well. There is going to be a sensation at Silver City in the morning, Peter."

"I scent et on the breeze," Pete agreed. "I'll be thar, you bet."

"Me too!" the parrot.

"Too bad we didn't bring along that extra horse, now, Sal," Dick observed. "You will have to hoof it, Pete."

"Which I feel jest like doin' to git, ther kinks out of my legs, my boy. Lead on, an' you will find that Pete Parrot won't be fur behind ye when ye git thar."

So they moved forward, still talking.

They came to the stream, or river, and entering it, waded to the north, all the time keeping a lookout for the most likely landing-place.

At last they came to an open space that looked inviting, and came out of the water, when Pete got down on his hands and knees to examine the ground as well as he could.

"Yas, this hyer looks like et," he reported.

"Hyers' boots, plain enough, and they p'int to ther west."

"Then we'll point that way, too," decided Dick. "No use trying to keep the trail, for that would be hard enough in daylight, so we'll aim for the hills and take our chance about finding the cabin. Forward!"

And forward they went, at a quick walk.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A GALLANT RESCUE AND A STORY.

In due time they reached the hills, but at a point where there did not appear to be the ghost of a trail.

Nevertheless, as it happened, it was the very spot where the three horsemen had entered with their prisoner some hours before, and they were nearer their desired destination than they imagined.

Leaving Pete and Silver City Sal together for a few minutes, Dick went up along the hills a little distance, then down, but found no spot more favorable for entrance, and so it was decided that they should penetrate from that point and see what would come of it.

Pete, being on foot, led the way, picking the trail—or the only possible passage he could find for the horses.

Presently an exclamation from Dick brought him to a stop.

"What aile et, Dicky?" Pete asked.

"A light."

"Whar?"

"I can just see it over the rocks. Keep off to the right, and we'll come nearer to it. Silent, now."

They moved on again, and presently the light was seen again, now nearer, and the rest of the way to it seemed open and plain. And just at that moment a scream was heard.

It was a woman's voice, and a cry for help.

Then came a rough-voiced execration, followed by another feminine scream.

Deadwood Dick leaped from his horse immediately, telling Pete to remain there, and made his way in the direction of the cabin with all haste, weapon in hand ready for use.

"Unhand me, villain!" he recognized the voice of Bessie Reynold. "Help! Help!"

"Shut up, fool!" cried the man's voice. "If you don't I'll silence you in a way ye won't relish. Stop yer strugglin', will ye?"

"Never! Let me go instantly, you brute! Who are you, and what do you mean by this attempt to carry me away from here? It was bad enough to be here in the company of this hag, but you—"

"Sh! I am yer friend, gall I was yer daddy's friend. I have come ter git ye out of this hyer, ef ye will only let me do et."

Deadwood Dick was at the open door, now.

He recognized the man as the pretending scout from Wyoming, and also that the prisoner was Bessie.

"Then tell me who you are, sir," Bessie insisted.

"I am—"

"Let me tell you who he is," spoke Deadwood Dick, and he showed himself with weapons covering the old scout and the hag: "He is a genuine old fraud!"

Gil Bliss had released the girl and turned, at the first sound of Dick's voice, attempting to draw a weapon, but he was too late.

"Take it easy!" Dick ordered, "or I'll drop you in your tracks."

"What d'ye want hyer?" the scout growled.

"You, for one thing."

"And how d'ye think ter take me?"

"Either dead or alive, and it makes little difference to me which it is."

"He is a bad man," croaked Mother Mexico.

"He came here and tried to rob me of my dearie, sir. Take him away, won't you?"

"You are another old fraud as great as he," reminded Dick.

"Me! Goodness mercy, no!" crossing herself.

"I have been only caring for my dearie, sir; isn't it so, sweet child?"

She appealed to Bessie.

"Yes, you have been caring for me, with a purpose," Bessie admitted. "You have been keeping me here, a prisoner, paid by some one."

"Yes, dearie, yes, that is true; but not a prisoner. It was your lover who gave you into my keeping, to keep you from harm until he came again, and haven't I been trying to do it?"

"My lover would never do a thing of the kind," Bessie protested. "He is too honorable a man to stoop to such a thing."

"But, dearie, it was all for your good—"

"Shut up, you old humbug!" cried Deadwood Dick, in disgust. "It was Silver City Sal who employed you for this dirty business."

"Oh! no! on my—"

"Shut up your croaking, I know better. Pete? Sal?"

He called out to them, and their voices immediately answered him.

Not for a second had he taken his eyes from the faces of the old scout and the old woman.

Steps were quickly heard without, and Pete Parrot and Silver City Sal came into the room, Pete with a weapon in hand. At sight of Bliss, he cried:

"Hyar ye aire, ar' ye? Consarn yer pictur', but I've a notion ter bore ye through ther diarfram, jest oncet fer luck! You ar' a p'izen old viper, d'ye know thet' durn gast ye!"

"I'm 'most sorry I didn't leave ye in a wuss fix 'n what I did," the growl in response.

"Disarm him, Pete, and tie him. "If you re-

sist, old man, I'll drop you as I would a dog. You will not deceive us a second time."

"Wull, nobody wants to, anyhow. I hev failed, but I hev ther satisfaction of knowin' that my mission hyer was a honest one, anyhow. I ain't afeerd of bein' made a prisoner."

"That is talk. Bind the old gal too, Pete."

"But, good sir, I am innocent; I am—"

"As guilty as I am, Mother Mexico," spoke up Silver City Sal. "You know it was I who employed you for this questionable work."

"You?" cried Bessie.

"Yes, I. To cheat Fred Wiltner."

"Dare you speak my lover's name, Miss Nobody?"

"Call me what you please, I am still a thousand times more honorable than he."

"I will not hear his good name dragged down by you. He is an honorable man, and I love him!"

"Yes, I know you love him, but he is a scoundrel, all the same. He has been playing the hypocrite before you, in order to get hold of your father's mine. Oh! he has a lovely character!"

"Deadwood Dick, will you hear him thus aspersed?"

"There is the best of ground for it, Miss Reynold," Dick soberly answered. "Your lover is nothing less than an outlaw, and maybe a murderer, too. There, do not take it to heart; he is unworthy your least thought."

"I cannot—I will not believe it."

"Will you answer a question or two?"

"Yes, yes."

"Well, was it not he who first proposed that you should engage me to plead his cause with your father?"

"Yes, it was."

"And he appointed the cottonwood motte as the place of meeting, and set the hour for you?"

"Yes; or, that is, we talked it over together."

"Exactly. Well, that was a neat scheme to remove me from his path. He appeared at your cabin, made you a prisoner, and then rode on to the motte to lie in ambush for me—"

"Good heavens! Would you have me understand that my lover is Captain Blue-beard?"

"He is none other."

The girl uttered a groan.

"Besides, it is quite probable that he killed your father."

"My God! this is more than I can bear. It cannot be true, Deadwood Dick, it cannot!"

"Unless it was this old fraud here," Dick adied.

He indicated the old scout.

"Me!" the old man screamed, in a frightened way.

"Well, you will be required to prove that you didn't do it, I guess, old man. Do you think you can do that?"

"I can only tell the truth about et, that's all. I didn't kill him, but I found him thar dead when I kem along ther trail. I ain't sayin' that we wouldn't 'a' had a mortal fight, ef I'd found him livin', but I didn't."

"Why should you have fought?" asked Dick.

"Cause, I kem to carry off this hyer gal, and Sid would hev knowed et the minnet he sot eyes on me."

"Which will go a good ways toward proving that you *did* kill him. But, now that you have told us so much, tell the whole story. You may as well be frank, now that you have begun."

"Et begins at ther time Sid and me was pards up in Wyoming."

"No matter, let us have the facts of the matter. There has got to be a general cleaning up, now."

"Well, Sid an' me was pards, an' we took this hyer chick away from a rovin' band of Injuns one night, when she was only a babby. Sid had a wife, then, an' he laid claim to ther chick 'cause he had a woman ter look after et. I held that my claim was best 'cause I hadn't nobody."

"And Reynold carried his point?"

"Yes; but thar was papers pinned up in ther chick's clothes, an' I took them an' held fast to 'em. Ef he had ther kid I had the papers, an' from that time we sort o' drifted apart. I laid ther papers by, an' fer many a long year hardly thought of 'em. Meanwhile Sid had moved off with ther gal, after losin' his wife, an' I was out in ther cold."

"Yes, go on."

"Wull, at last I got them 'ar out an' took 'em over to ther town an' had a lawyer look at 'em, an' when he had done et he told me ter set out an' find this hyer gal ef et took all ther days of my life ter do et. Said she had blue blood in her veins, and that thar was a fortun' awaitin' ef she ever turned up to claim et. So, I kem

down hyer fer that purpose, an' I meant ter take ther gal back with me or bu'st."

"And you swear this story is true, and that you did not kill Sidney Reynold yourself, do you?"

"I swear et, on both heads."

#### CHAPTER XIV.

##### CAPTAIN BLUE BEARD UNMASKED.

ALL had listened with close attention to this story, especially Bessie herself and Silver City Sal.

"I see a double object in Fred's devotion to you, Miss Reynold," the latter now said. "Maybe he knew something about your life history."

"I do not know," Bessie thoughtfully mused. "It seems more like a dream than anything else. I cannot believe him false, for I loved him so—yes, I did love him, and would have died for him."

She bowed her head in her hands and wept.

"Did you suppose you were really the child of Sidney Reynold?" asked Dick.

"Yes, and never had a thought otherwise, though now that here is proof otherwise, I can understand many things he did and said that used to seem queer."

"And they would go to prove that this man's story is true?"

"Yes, yes. I once heard him mention missing papers that I ought to have, but he said maybe they would turn up some time."

"Have you those papers with you?" asked Dick of the old man.

"No; they are with the lawyer."

"Give this young lady his name and address, and don't dare to lie to her or it will be the worse for you."

"The old man complied, and so promptly that there did not seem room to doubt his word, and note was taken of the name and place he gave."

There was further talk and explanation, all around, and considering this place as good as any for them to stay till morning, Pete and Dick arranged to spend the remainder of the night there.

Miss Reynold was made as comfortable as possible, and the prisoners were all made secure, and Dick and Pete took turns watching.

Before daylight they were in the saddle and on their way to Silver City.

Bessie and Silver City Sal were allowed to ride, while the others had to walk, and their aim was to reach the camp at an early hour.

In the mean time Paul Young and his men had returned there on the previous evening, after a fruitless chase. They had found the horses of the outlaws, but not a sign of the men or the prisoner.

There was nothing more they could do that night, and all proceeded to seek their rest.

It was later when Fred Wiltner returned to the camp.

He had a story to tell. He had, he said, gone beyond his claim to the hills, in the hope of finding something there, and had seen a company of horsemen file out and move off to the westward. Being alone, he did not dare to make his presence known, but he had no doubt they were Captain Blue-beard and his band, and he believed he could find their den by daylight.

So it was proposed that at an early hour the whole company should set out for that place, and, if they could pick up the trail on the hardpan, follow the outlaws and run them out of the country if they could do nothing more.

This arrangement made, they gave attention to rest or pleasure, as variously suited them.

At an early hour they were up and ready.

The whole camp of Silver City was astir to see them off, and they were about starting when some persons were seen entering the town from the west.

"Hello! what have we here?" asked Henry White.

"Indians, as I live!" exclaimed Wiltner.

"They look it."

Such they were not, however. They were Deadwood Dick, Pete Parrot and the others.

By way of disguise, they had thrown blankets around their shoulders, in order to get well into the camp before they were recognized.

Some of the horsemen were mounted, others were standing ready to leap into the saddle, while others still were bringing their horses to the point of starting, but all paused to wait for the strangers to come up.

They came slowly on, two women on horseback and three men and another woman walking.

When they came up, off fell their blankets, and they were recognized.

"Deadwood Dick!" was the cry that was raised.

"Yes, Deadwood Dick, with the lost found and the mystery solved," Dick responded. And he added:

"Why, what's the matter, Mr. Wiltner? Are you ill? You look as if you are ready to wilt right off your horse. I am not a ghost, as you will find."

Every eye was thus brought to bear upon the man named, and he was found to be deathly pale, while a dew of perspiration was seen upon his forehead. He had a convulsive grip on the rein.

"What the deuce ails you, Wiltner?" demanded White of Bullion Bar.

"A—a sudden pain around the heart," the villain answered.

"It ought to be there, a pain of remorse," cried Deadwood Dick, sternly. "I arrest you, Fred Wiltner, on charge of being Captain Bluebeard, and also of being the man who killed Sidney Reynold."

A bomb could not have created greater excitement.

Dick had his man covered, while Pete Parrot, who had pushed forward to his side, lay on his horse and also covered him.

"It is a lie!" screamed the terrified rascal. "You cannot prove one word of it! I defy you to prove it! What fool business is it all, anyhow?"

"I can prove it, on the contrary," Dick rejoined, coldly. "Silver City Sal, what do you say about it?"

"I say it is true. I have known it for some time."

"It is false, false!"

"There is one way to find out what there is in it," cried Paul Young. "You can stand trial, the same as I did, and if innocent you will come out all right. Men, I say arrest him."

"To shift suspicion from your own shoulders," cried the suspected man.

"No; to put the crime where it belongs."

Many others were of the same mind, and Wiltner was speedily disarmed and rendered helpless and harmless.

About the same time Silver City Sal drew a bead upon another man, whom she charged with being Captain Bluebeard's lieutenant, and he, too, was captured.

This fellow weakened at once, admitted his guilt, and begged to be allowed to appear for the prosecution. He promised to tell the whole story and hold nothing back, and the privilege was given him.

No mistake had been made. Fred Wiltner was the guilty man, and had been for some time arranging his scheme to wed Bessie Reynold and get possession of the mine; and, not only that, but of other property which he had knowledge was coming to her. The appearance of Deadwood Dick, however, alarmed him, and he made it his first business to remove him.

Making a dupe of Bessie, he used her to lure Dick to the cottonwood motte, where he arranged to lie in ambush and murder him. On coming to the Reynold cabin for the purpose of imprisoning Bessie, to keep her at home, he met Reynold, and he, having somehow gained the knowledge, charged him with being Captain Bluebeard. Seeing his whole plans likely to miscarry, now, the man sprung out of the saddle and dealt the old man his deathblow. That done, he detailed one of his men to carry the body to Young's place as soon as opportunity offered, so as to put the crime on him.

His actions from that point have been traced for the reader, and all has been made plain. He could not offset the direct proofs brought to bear against him, and when Deadwood Dick and Silver City Sal told their stories, he had nothing left to stand on. The two men who had gone through Silver City with a woman prisoner, were only a decoy made up by Wiltner in order to lure Young off on a false scent, that he might have the more time to attend to his own schemes, and to learn where the missing girl really was. The note that had been sent to the crowd at the time they were gathered before the Reynold cabin, had been cleverly flung up into the air by Lieutenant Whiskers.

All the points were brought out and made plain, and when the evidence was all in, Bessie turned and offered her hand to Paul Young.

"Pardon me, Paul, for having wronged you," she said. "For months my mind has been poisoned against you by this villain."

"I knew how it was, Bessie, and there is nothing to forgive," happy Paul made reply.

The enraged citizens of Silver City took Wiltner away.

Protest was useless; they had their way!

All the rascals were punished as they deserved, and those who had been wronged, and all who had lent a helping hand to the cause of justice, were rewarded.

Deadwood Dick and his pard were well paid and greatly praised for the service they had rendered.

Bessie was found to belong to a wealthy and honored family, and came into all her rights. She and Paul Young were married. Their claims adjoined, and are now one, and the Reynold Mine is being worked in their interest. At last accounts they were about to sell out and remove East, where their great wealth will give them position, and where their pretty children can enjoy advantages the wild Southwest cannot bestow.

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